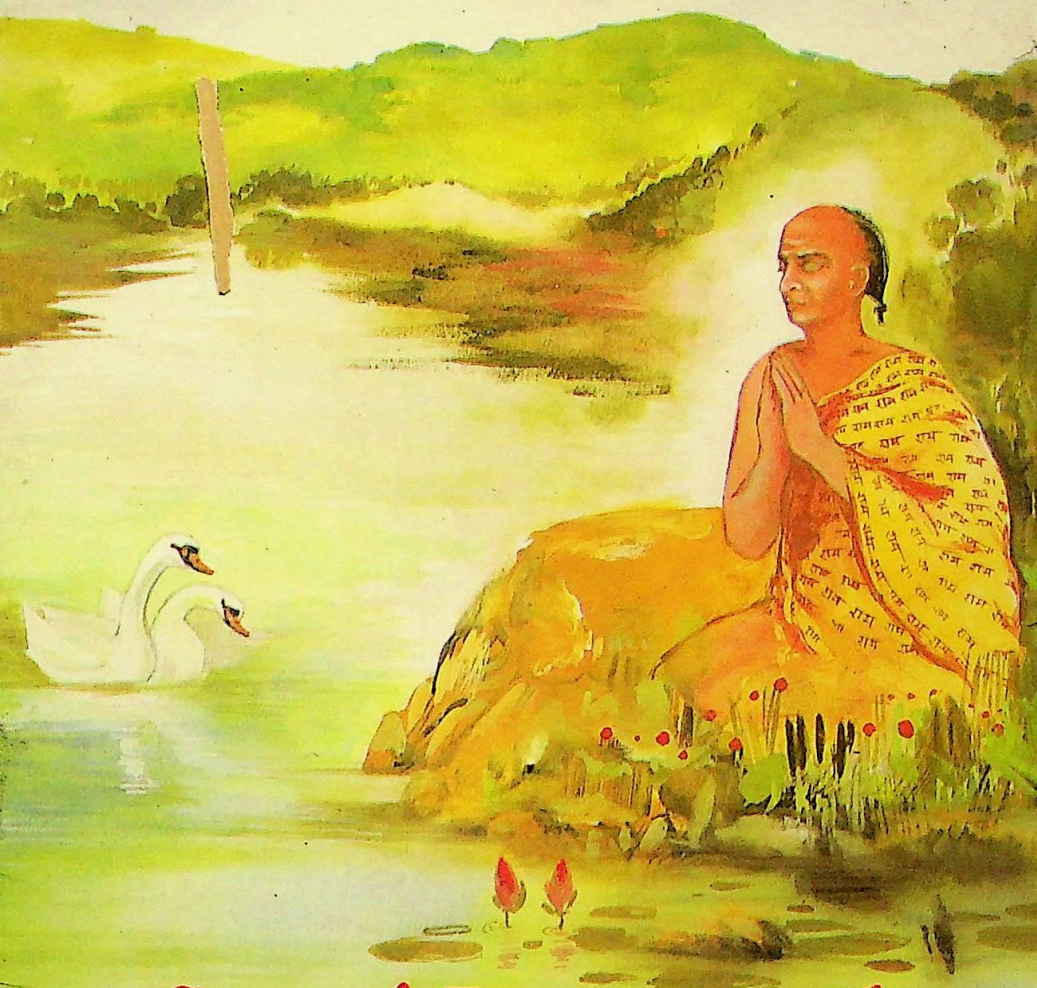
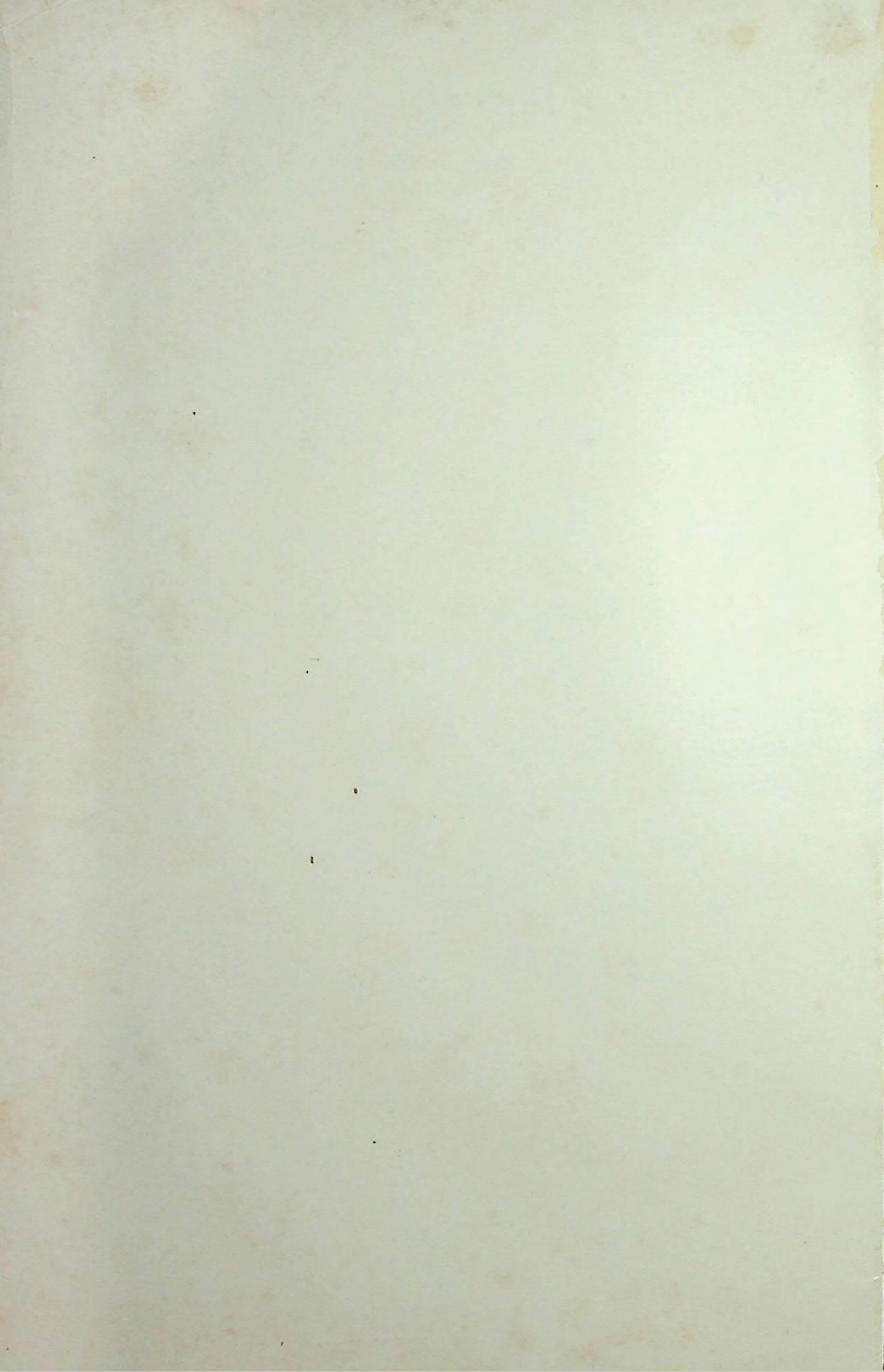


Shri Ramcharitmanas



Swami Premananda



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SHRI RAMCHARITMANAS
THE
PEOPLE'S SONG OF SONGS

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Shri Ramcharitmanas
The
People's Song of Songs

Swami Premananda

To Henry
with best regards.
W. Premananda

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Foreword

Salutation to Ram and Lakshman, to goddess Sita daughter of Janak,

Salutation to Shiva, Indra, Yama, Fire, Sun, Moon and the Wind gods.

The noble story of Ram is the Swan of Manasarovar, the mind of man.

I have carefully gone through the manuscript of Shri Ramcharitmanas, the People's Song of Songs, by A. Premananda o. praem., a person deeply devoted to the goddess of wisdom, Mother Saraswati. It gives me great joy to write a few words of appreciation and good wishes. The learned author has divided his work into five parts: the story of Ram, the person of Ram, devotion, Ram's devotees and Ramrajya. He has also given us a few beautiful scenes from Ramrajya. Just as the five elements, earth, water, fire, sky and air unite to form the body, these five chapters make up this book on Lord Ram. It is my earnest wish that like the sacred drink 'Panchamrit' (made of milk, curd, sugar, honey and clarified butter), this book proves to be a wholesome nourishment to everyone in the society.

The creation of the world is from the happy fusion of action, knowledge and devotion. Action is the expression of the Being, knowledge the expression of the Mind and devotion the expression of the Supreme Happiness of the One Absolute, Sacchidananda. The Scriptures (Vedas) have given us an elaborate description of the three paths towards the final goal, Moksha. Tulsidas, one of the greatest who ever walked the path of devotion valued all the three paths equally. That is why avoiding any controversy on Nirguna and Saguna, he affirms that both are but the One indescribable, infinite, beginningless and incomparable Form of the Absolute, Brahman.

Fully awake to the shortcomings of our society, the author in his introduction impresses on us the urgency of a struggle

for a better society and the usefulness of his work in this context. "We are living in an age of tensions," he says: "tensions of a materialistic power culture on the world level. Our own land is plagued by religious fanaticism, communal tensions, caste rivalries, provincial and linguistic chauvinism, poverty, injustice and oppression. Corruption is rampant!"

I am in full agreement when the author says: "The need of the hour is for the women and men of good will to come together and put up a strenuous struggle against the divisive forces in society."

The writer accepts Ramcharitmanas, which gives us the message of humanity, as a powerful means to overcome the evils in our present society. It places before us the ideal character of Lord Ram: the ideal Kshatriya and King, the perfect order and welfare in his kingdom, the correct understanding of Varnashrama (caste and state of life), family piety in parents, children, brothers and sisters, the ideals of self discipline and truthfulness, his love for all his bhaktas and those who take refuge in him. In short Ram is indeed the treasure house of all virtues. Nowhere in history can one find such a noble example as that of Lord Ram who abandoned even his spouse Sita for the good of his subjects, Sita faithful and pure and most dear to his heart.

The present work is the fruit of the untiring devotion and labour of the author. I am fully confident that it will be of real help in putting an end to the evil practices which have crept into our society, politics, economy and religion. It should help us to rise above our narrow confines to the very realization of our human existence. May this book be a powerful means in our society in attaining this goal.

Feast of Shravanī 27-8-1988 Satwa Baba, Jamuna Das

C.K. 10/48 Manikarnika Ghat

Translation by J. Topno

Varanasi

शुभाशंसा

नमो स्तु रामाय सलक्ष्मणाय देव्यै च तस्यै जनकात्मजायै ।
नमोऽस्तु रुद्रेन्द्रयमानिलेम्यो नमो स्तु चन्द्राकर्मरुद्रगणेभ्यः ॥

श्री रामचरित — मानस मराल. मां सरस्वती के परमोपासक ए० प्रेमानन्द ओ० प्रेम द्वारा लिखित 'श्री रामचरितमानस द पीपुल्स सॉंग ऑफ सॉगस' का आद्योपान्त मैंने अवलोकन किया है । इस पर शुभाशंसा के दो शब्द लिखते हुए मुझे अपार हर्ष की अनुभूति हो रही है । विद्वान लेखक ने अपनी इस रचना को पाँच भागों में विभक्त किया है, जिनमें क्रमशः राम का कथानक, राम का व्यक्तित्व, भक्ति, राम के भक्त एवं रामराज्य की मनोहारिणी झोंकियाँ दिखायी गयी हैं । निःसन्देह शरीर में स्थित पाँच (क्षिति — जल — पावक — गगन — समीर) तत्वों के समान इन पाँचों भागों की उपयोगिता निर्विवाद है और आशा है कि पंचामृत की तरह समाज के प्रत्येक व्यक्ति के लिए यह रचना लाभप्रद सिद्ध होगी ।

कर्म, उपासना और ज्ञान के सामंजस्य से ही संसार की सृष्टि हुई है । सच्चिदानन्द भगवान के सन्देश से कर्मकाण्ड, चिदंश से ज्ञानकाण्ड और आनन्दांश से उपासनाकाण्ड का सृजन हुआ है । श्रुति (वेद) में इन्हीं त्रिविध काण्डों का विशद विवेचन है जिनका अवलम्ब लेकर साधक जीवन के चरम बिन्दु (मोक्ष) तक पहुँचता है । साधक शिरोमणि गोस्वामी तुलसीदास यद्यपि भक्ति पथ के पथिक हैं, परन्तु उनकी दृष्टि समतावादी है । यही कारण है कि वे सगुण — निर्गुण के विवाद में न पड़कर स्पष्ट रूप से कहते हैं — “अगुण सगुण दुई ब्रम्ह स्वरूपा, अकथ अगाध अनादि अनुपा ।”

सामाजिक त्रुटियों के परिमार्जन में सजग श्री ए० प्रेमानन्द ने प्रस्तुत रचना के प्राक्कथन (Introduction) में इस ग्रन्थ की उपयोगिता तथा आवश्यकता की ओर ध्यान दिलाते हुए कहा है -- "We are living in an age of tensions, tensions of a materialistic power culture on the world level. Our own land is plagued by religious fanaticism, communal tensions, caste

rivalries, provincial and linguistic chauvinism, poverty, injustice and oppression. Corruption is rampant."

हम लेखक के इन विचारों से पूर्ण रूपेण सहमत हैं कि :- "The need of the hour is for the women and men of good will to come together and put up a strenuous struggle against the divisive forces in society".

मानवता का सन्देश देने वाले "राम चरित मानस" को लेखक ने वर्तमान कठिनाइयों पर विजय पाने का साधन स्वीकार किया है क्योंकि इसमें श्री रामचन्द्र के जीवन में आदर्श मानव चरित्र, आदर्श क्षत्रिय चरित्र, आदर्श नृपति चरित्र के साथ समाजानुशासन की पूर्णता, प्रजारंजम की पूर्णता, वर्णाश्रम की पूर्णता, मातृ-पितृ-भ्रातृ भक्ति की पूर्णता, जितोन्द्रियता तथा सत्सव्रत की पूर्णता, भक्तवत्सलता एवं शरणागतवत्सलता आदि गुणों का भण्डार भरा हुआ है । प्रजा के रंजन हेतु अपनी सती, साध्वी, प्रेमवती प्राणप्रिया जानकी को भी त्यागकर भगवान राम ने जो आदर्श जगत् के सम्मुख रखा उसका दूसरा उदाहरण विश्व के इतिहास में सम्भवतः कहीं नहीं मिल सकता । यह सच है कि मछली सागर की लहरों में उछल-कूद मचाकर उससे आनन्द उठा सकती है परन्तु उसकी गहराई की थाह पाना उसके सामर्थ्य के बाहर है ।

प्रस्तुत रचना लेखक की सतत साधना का सुफल है । मुझे पूर्ण विश्वास है कि इस रचना से सामाजिक, राजनीतिक, आर्थिक, धार्मिक कुरीतियों का अन्त करने में सहायता मिलेगी और मानव संकीर्णताओं की परिधियों से ऊपर उठकर "मनुर्भव" की उक्ति को चरितार्थ करेगा और लेखक की लेखनी और सशक्त होकर समाज के सम्मुख उपस्थित होगी ।

श्रावणोपर्व दिनांक : 27-8-88

(सतुआ. बाबा - जमुनादास)
सी० के० 10/48 मणिकर्णिकाघाट,
वा रा ण सी ।

Introduction

Ramcharitmanas is the masterpiece of one of the most lovable saints of our land. In this comparatively small but beautiful poem, the poet and devotee, Goswami Tulsidas, tells us the story of his Lord, Ram the object of his devotion. At the same time he is narrating the story of his own search and experience of the Absolute, Parabrahman. Eventhough such an experience cannot be expressed in words, the sublime poetry of the book gives us a glimpse into the experience of the poet. The saints stand between the people and the teachings of a religion and show them by word and example how to translate the teachings into their lives. They give a vision and meaning to otherwise meaningless existence. In the Hindi speaking region of India, Ramcharitmanas has been guiding the path of the common man and shaping his religious genius for the past four centuries. It would not be an exaggeration, therefore, to call it 'the Veda of the common man' in the Hindi belt, his 'Song of Songs'.

We are living in an age of tensions, tensions of a materialistic power culture, on the world level. Our own land is plagued by religious fanaticism, communal tensions, caste rivalries, provincial and linguistic chauvinism, poverty, injustice and oppression. Corruption is rampant. Calamities of the people are muddy waters for callous politicians to fish in. Some find it fair game to sow seeds of mistrust and fear among people and reap fruits of selfish gain.

The need of the hour is for the women and men of good will to come together and put up a strenuous struggle against the divisive forces in society. Coming together of people of different cultural backgrounds and religious persuasions can be very enriching when there is mutual understanding and respect, and openness to the cultural and spiritual wealth of one another. This should happen not only on an intellectual and scholarly level, but also on the level of the ordinary man, in the slums of cities, in street corners and market places, in schools and public institutions, in villages

and towns. Only thus can we weave the rich and multi-coloured fabric of our Indian society. If this book of simple reflections could be of some help in this, I consider myself amply rewarded.

RAMCHARITMANAS: ITS AUTHOR AND SOURCES

TULSIDAS, HIS LIFE

Goswami Tulsidas was the son of Atmaram Dubey and Hulsī. According to popular opinion accepted by many scholars he was born in 1526 or 1527 A.D. in a village called Saron in the District Eta of Uttar Pradesh. He was abandoned by his parents in early childhood. It was said that the child showed certain ominous signs foreboding misfortune for the family. The boy eked out his living, begging from door to door calling out: "Ram"! This got him the nickname "Rambola" (He calls on Ram, the caller of Ram).

Tulsidas got married and had a son who died already in his infancy. He was very much attached to his wife. A story is told that once, while his young wife was away in her parents' house, he was overcome with passionate feeling for her. He undertook a very difficult journey to her house. On their meeting however, his wife reproached him saying that if he had as much love for Ram as for her, he would have been liberated from the cycle of rebirths (samsara). Her words sank deep into his heart. Without any hesitation he left his wife, hearth and home and became a sannyasin.

Tulsidas spent most of his years in Varanasi. He wrote several works of high literary quality. It is said that his old age was full of sickness and suffering. After a long life of asceticism and loving devotion (bhakti) to Ram he passed away in the year 1623 A.D.

THE WORKS OF TULSIDAS

Scholars attribute to him twelve books. All of them are inspired by bhakti. Dohavali, Kavitali and Vinayapatrika are devotional poems. Vinayapatrika, literally, a letter of humble petition, is a long supplication. Tulsidas submits this petition to Ram who is presiding over the royal assembly in which are present the great Rambhaktas like Bharat and

Hanuman. Ramcharitmanas however is the masterpiece of Tulsidas which he completed around the year 1575.

RAMCHARITMANAS: NAME, CONTENT, LANGUAGE, STYLE

The name means "The story of Ram which is like the Manasarovar lake". Manasarovar is a lake in the Himalayan plateau of Tibet. It is filled with pure transparent water situated among the ice covered peaks. It is often mentioned in the Hindu mythology. The gods frequent this lake surrounded by exquisitely beautiful scenery. It abounds in colourful fishes and beautiful pearls. Swans swim and sport in it picking up gems and pearls from the water.

Tulsidas compares his Ramcharitmanas to this lake. The virtuous and holy men are the swans. The virtues and attributes of Ram are the gems and pearls. The story is the refreshing and purifying water. Like the swans the holy men refresh and purify themselves in this water, by devotedly listening to the story and meditating on the attributes of Ram.

The subject of Ramcharitmanas is the story of Ram, around which Tulsidas weaves his teaching on bhakti. He illustrates this teaching with examples of different types of devotees.

Tulsidas wrote his book in Avadhi the common language spoken in the region round Ayodhya at that time, with a mixture of Vrajabhasha. Due to shortage of vocabulary in Avadhi he uses also several sanskrit words, but adapting them to the local linguistic forms. He calls the language of his book "bhasha", the common speech. The language is simple. It can be easily understood by people with a fair amount of education. As at present it was the custom in those times too for scholars (pundits) to read out and explain the scriptures to illiterate people.

The use of common language was one of the reasons why many pundits did not accept Ramcharitmanas in the beginning. The prevailing idea was that works of literature should be in the cultured language, Sanskrit. To illustrate the

opposition and the subsequent acceptance (and also the excellence of the book), people tell the following story:

At a gathering of the scholars, the pundits told Tulsidas to keep Ramcharitmanas in the temple of Shiva. They piled up the scriptures and other famous books on the top of it and locked the temple for the night. The next morning the temple was opened in front of all, and lo! the book of Tulsidas was lying on top of all the books with the words "Satyam, Shivam—Sundaram" (True, Good, Beautiful) inscribed on it. That meant that Shiva had put his seal of approval and praise on Ramcharitmanas.

The style of Ramcharitmanas is simple, because Tulsidas wrote it for the common people. Still it is a work of poetic excellence. He was a genius of a poet. He used his mastery over language and his psychological insight to the best advantage. His expressions and similes are familiar and incisive. The different characters in the story are described with realism. The narration is spontaneous and fluent even though much of his teaching on bhakti is woven into it. The book is made eminently readable by his skilful use of subtle wit and humour.

THE POPULARITY OF RAMCHARITMANAS

Ramcharitmanas became very popular already in the time of Tulsidas. Nabhadass his contemporary calls him an incarnation of Valmiki, to help the people of Kaliyuga to cross the ocean of transmigration. "Tulsidas has brought us the boat of Ramcharitmanas with which one can easily cross the vast ocean of sansara".

As the modern reader may find it difficult to understand the language of Ramcharitmanas, without a special study, the recent editions include paraphrases or literal translations in modern Hindi. The verses being short and rhythmic, lend themselves easily to devotional chanting and memorising. Devout Hindus regularly chant verses from Ramcharitmanas. "Akhand Ramayan" is also a popular practice. Akhand Ramayan, the chanting of the whole Ramcharitmanas without interruption, takes about twenty-four hours. It is begun

and concluded with special religious ceremonies. Akhand Ramayan is usually a community celebration, by a village or city neighbourhood, for obtaining of favours, thanksgiving or simply as an expression of devotion and religious fervour. Parts or sometimes the whole of Ramcharitmanas are acted out on stage. The whole story takes several days or even a full month. Mostly it is not done by professionals, but the people of the area themselves. It is attended with great religious enthusiasm and fervour by the common people. The acting out of Ramayan (Ramlila) is an annual feature in places like Ramnagar, near Varanasi. They are grand celebrations and are popular festivals.

In the Hindi belt it is the Ramcharitmanas that has popularised the story of Ram and promoted bhakti among the common people. They keep the book in a very important place in their homes, venerate it, read it or listen to portions from it regularly and try to follow the teachings therein. It is not surprising therefore to see even illiterate people recalling apt verses from Ramcharitmanas in conversation and interpreting them in their correct contexts.

THE SOURCES OF RAMCHARITMANAS

The main sources of Tulsidas for his masterpiece Ramcharitmanas are the Valmiki Ramayana and the Adhyatma Ramayana. The Sanskrit word 'ayana' means road or path. Ramayana, the ayana of Ram, is the story describing the journey of Ram. This long journey interspersed with several long and short stopover periods lasted fourteen years. It was filled with adventures culminating in Ram's victory over Ravan and Sita's release from Ravan's hands. In this book we use the Hindi word Ramayan in place of the Sanskrit, Ramayana.

From ancient times folklore used to narrate the heroic deeds of the kshatriya kings belonging to the famous Ikshavaku¹ or Solar dynasty. Ram was the most famous king of this dynasty. Parts of Ram's story are found in Buddhist and Jain literature and also in the Mahabharata and the Harivansa. Legend has it that it was Valmiki the first poet who brought together the then existing ballads on Ram, expanded them

and put them into Sanskrit verse, creating the great epic Valmiki Ramayan. The exact date of this epic is not known, but scholars are of opinion that it was three hundred years before the Christian era that it found light of day.

The Ramayan of Valmiki is considered a work of unrivalled poetic and ethical excellence. Ram the hero of the epic is endowed with all the noble human qualities. He is the ideal king concerned with the welfare of his subjects, the protector of the weak and the oppressed. He is an obedient son and an affectionate brother. He is a faithful husband, loyal to one wife. Invincible in war, he is fair in his strategies and generous to the vanquished. In short, he is the ideal person of righteous conduct, "Maryada Purushottam". Ram is surrounded by persons distinguished for their virtues. Realism and psychological insight mark the portrayal of their characters.

Valmiki Ramayan found its way to all corners of India. Professional bards called Kushas and Levas sang the episodes of Ram through the length and breadth of the country. To satisfy the inquisitiveness of their listeners they added their own embellishments. Even outside India Ramayan had its influence. We see different versions of Valmiki's epic in Shri Lanka, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and China and even in the west, as far as Turkey. Ramayan has undergone much change in these lands and cultures. However it is commonly accepted that by and large the ethical values enshrined in the Ramayan, have remained intact.

While the story of Ram is a source of inspiration to a good moral life in foreign lands, in India itself Ram the hero of the story has gradually become the avatar of god Vishnu and thus the object of devotion for millions of people. Specialised works based on Valmiki Ramayan with bhakti to Ram the avatic person as the main theme surfaced in the different regions and languages of India, like Adhyatma Ramayan, Adbhut Ramayan, Ananda Ramayan and others.

ADHYATMA RAMAYAN

Adhyatma Ramayan is a comparatively short Sanskrit work

written in the fourteenth or fifteenth century A.D. As the name itself suggests (adhyatma means spiritual) it lays special emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the story of Ram. It retells the story by Valmiki in an abridged form. As it is a book of devotion, it makes a few variations from the original, in consideration for the sensibilities of devotees. For example: knowing the plan of Ravan to abduct Sita, Ram told her to enter the sacred fire and retire to Vaikuntha, leaving her image in front of the forest hut. (Vaikuntha is the home of Lord Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi who descended as Sita to be Ram's wife). Ravan thus could not touch the real Sita. For Ravan too, the real motive for abducting Sita was not passion, but his desire to die at the hands of Ram and attain moksha. Ravan being a Rakshas knew too well that he could not become a bhakta because his nature was dominated by tamas, the 'dark' strand of the three gunas². The only way left for him was to encourage Ram by taking away Sita and cause war with him and his own death by Ram's arrows, and thus attain moksha. Tulsidas accepts the position of Adhyatma Ramayan.

However Tulsidas has his own views on bhakti. In the Adhyatma Ramayan bhakti is a means to attain spiritual wisdom which leads to realization and final liberation. For Tulsidas bhakti itself in its highest stage is final liberation. Spiritual wisdom (Jnana or Gyana, the spelling used in Ramcharitmanas) is only a means to attain bhakti. Further the bhaktas of Ramcharitmanas are men of selfless service (parhit nirat). Again the way of bhakti is not a preserve of sannyasins and ascetics, but a public road for all men and women in the world.

THE PURPOSE OF WRITING RAMCHARITMANAS

As Tulsidas says in one of the concluding verses of his book, he wrote the story of Ram in order to attain serenity of mind by dispelling the gloom of his heart (swantastamah santaye). As a genuine bhakta Tulsidas wants his work to be of benefit to others. He says: "Fame, poetry and prosperity are good only when they are beneficial to others, just as the

Ganges is good and holy because it brings blessing on every one".

कीरति भनिति भूति भलि सोई,
सुरसरि सम सब कहँ हित होई । (1: 13, 5)

Accordingly, to make his Ramcharitmanas accessible to all he wrote it in the popular language. He wanted the true devotees to drink from the fountain of Ram's story to their fill. Just like the bird Chakor (which is supposed to be in love with the moon) fixes its gaze constantly at the moon and drinks of its cool rays, the devotees of Ram yearn after and drink from the refreshing fountain of the story of Ram. Ramcharitmanas is such a lake that any one who bathes in it and drinks from it will be freed from all sins and the sorrows of his heart.

सादर मज्जन पान किए ते,
मिटहि पाप परिताप दिए के । (1: 42, 3)

In his introduction to Ramcharitmanas Tulsidas already gives a warning to those who look for erotic and suggestive stories and descriptions there. He does not cater to the sensual appetites of pleasure seekers. His book is clean like the Manasarovar itself, free of moss and unclean animals like frogs and leeches, on which the miserable crows and herons feed. No lascivious person need come to Ramcharitmanas looking for feed.

RELEVANCE OF RAMCHARITMANAS

Ramcharitmanas is not just a story book or a book of poetry. It offers a way of life, the path of bhakti, leading to liberation. Tulsidas addresses not only the sanyasis or ascetics, but the householders as well. Even though himself a sanyasi he had the householder constantly in view while writing the story. The path of bhakti which he offers is a common path, a rajpath (royal road) meant for all to walk on.

The human heart is not satisfied with a 'God in the sky'. The sublime heights to which philosophers soar is beyond the reach of an ordinary man. Whether the philosopher himself finds satisfaction there is another question. People want a

God whom they can see, hear, touch and feel; one whom they can experience in their daily lives. Man and God must be able to embrace each other. God has to enlighten the paths of man in this dark, confused and frightening world. Man needs a star to guide him and give him orientation in this turbulent ocean of life, and lead him through all the hazards of this life to the haven. This is provided in the person of Ram.

In the moral sphere, an enumeration of 'dos' and 'don'ts' with logical explanations and a promise of rewards and punishments do not give man the motivation and strength enough to walk the path laid down by the laws. He needs assurance that treading the right path is indeed possible and worth the trouble. For this he needs a strength which he cannot find in himself. This power comes to him when he surrenders himself to a superior being who is beneficent and powerful. Further he draws inspiration from the examples of noble men who have gone before him. For a devotee, Ram is the source of strength. Ram and his friends are the ideals pointing the way for him.

Mythologies of different religions help man to lead a virtuous and meaningful life. All myths may not be ennobling. But in every religion and culture there are inspiring myths woven around personalities, either historical or legendary. These myths support the faith and life of the people. When such religiocultural props are taken away by rationalism and technological culture,³ man feels helpless and looks for some other way out of the drudgery and meaninglessness of everyday life. Finding that science has not the solutions to his problems, and unable to face life's challenges, he takes refuge in alcohol, drugs, sex, money, power and even at times resorts to suicide. He escapes to an illusory world of phantasy, like the proverbial ostrich who digs his head into the sand in order to hide himself from his enemies.

I believe that good stories and great books which help man to a better life, a more loving society and nobler aspirations, and give him a purpose and goal in life are inspired by the Spirit of God. He raises up women and men of noble

character and holy life in every age and culture and fills them with wisdom to announce to their fellow beings the message of hope and liberation. Their lives are like beacons and their words guide us in the path of life. The Ramayan has been a guide to millions of people and an inspiration to them to a more upright life. Today too it continues to be so. I remember an illiterate farm labourer who used to wake up well before sunrise and chant a few verses from Ramcharitmanas. He would explain the verses to himself, narrate the incidents referred to, laugh and weep experiencing the happy and sad moments in Ram's life. This meditative prayer would continue nearly for an hour before he started with his morning ablutions. And this is not an isolated example, even though the emotional response may differ in different people.

The sages and saints transcend the boundaries of race, religion and culture. They are the common heritage of humanity. They carry the message of love of God and fellowmen. They exert great influence on their own and on the succeeding generations. It is necessary to understand these saints and their words in order to grasp the spiritual genius of a people. Religious people speak the language of their saints not merely in words, but in their lives and values.

India is a land rich in different religions and cultures. If we follow the teachings of our saints we can grow in mutual friendship and weld this nation into a harmonious whole. We can show those who consider religion to be a dividing force and the communalists who try to prove this by their actions, that true religion is a veritable force for unity and truly religious people are agents of unity and growth, and not of division and disintegration.

This book is not the fruit of a scientific study or of scholarly research. But I have read and reread the work of Tulsidas. I have repeatedly meditated on the message of this poem. I have reflected over it, prayed with it, sought the face of God following its guidance. Some of these experiences I want to share with others. This book is by no means exhaustive. It merely touches on some aspects of Ramcharitmanas.

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Note: All the quotations in Hindi are from Ramcharitmanas published by the Gita Press, Gorakhpur, U.P., in 1951. Reference numbers are given in brackets. The first number indicates the book (Kanda, Kand). The books are serially numbered, beginning with the Balakanda. The second number refers to the two lines verses (doha) and the following numbers to the four line verses (Chaupai), unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STORY OF RAM

Book One: Balkand

THE REASONS FOR THE DESCENT OF RAM NARAD'S CURSE

Once Narad, the sage of the gods (Devarshi) roving in the Himalayas saw a beautiful cave by the side of the river Ganges. Charmed by its beauty he settled there and started meditating on Vishnu and entered into ecstatic contemplation. Indra, the king of the gods, saw this and burned with jealousy. He feared that after his contemplation Narad would come and occupy the world of the gods, which he did not want. So he sent Kamdev, the god of love, to break his contemplation before it would mature. Kamdev tried his best, but failed to arouse sexual passion in Narad and break his samadhi (ecstatic contemplation). Rising from the samadhi in due time Narad felt very proud of his victory over Kamdev. He went to Shiva and boasted about it. Knowing Narad to be a proud boaster Shiva warned him against going to Vishnu to talk about it. However Narad could not contain himself. He went to Vaikunth⁴, the abode of Vishnu and boasted about his victory. Thereupon Vishnu decided to teach him a lesson.

On his way back to his ashram Narad saw a city full of beautiful women. He heard that the king of the city was conducting the swayamvara of his beautiful daughter Viswamohini. Narad promptly visited the king. Viswamohini was brought to the sage for his blessing. Seeing her beauty, flames of passion rose in his heart. He longed to marry her.

Coming out of the palace Narad prayed fervently to Vishnu to grant him his heart's desire. Vishnu appeared and

promised Narad that he would do whatever would be the best for him. Blinded as he was by passions, Narad did not realize what Vishnu meant by his words. He thought that Vishnu had given him so much beauty that the princess would surely choose him for her husband.

Narad presented himself in the swayamvara hall, filled with hope and rosy dreams. The princess walked gracefully round the hall, observing the suitors one by one. When she came to Narad she turned away her face in disgust. Shocked at this insult Narad was wondering what the reason was. Some one suggested to him that he go and look at his face in water. To his consternation he saw the ugly face of a monkey. Beside himself with rage he set out for Vaikunth to lay a curse on Vishnu. He met Vishnu on the way, accompanied by his consort and the princess Viswamohini. Narad cursed him saying: "You shall take descent as a man. You shall suffer from the separation of your wife. Monkeys shall be your helpers". Accepting the curse with a smile Vishnu removed the illusion (maya) with which he had enveloped Narad. Realizing the actual situation Narad felt very sorry for his curse and prayed to Vishnu that his curse be made fruitless. Vishnu did not accede to this, but told him to recite the hundred names of Shiva as a penance for his sin.

VISHNU'S BOON TO MANU AND SATRUPA

Manu had ruled his kingdom for many many years. Finally entrusting his kingdom to his sons, he and his wife, queen Satrupa left for the forest to practise severe penance (tapas). After thousands of years of austerities Vishnu appeared to them in the form of Ram and offered them a boon. Manu asked for a son "like you". He was granted the boon and both husband and wife were given the added boon of unswerving devotion to Ram. In course of time Manu was born as king Dasrath of Ayodhya.

DESTRUCTION AND LIBERATION OF RAVAN AND HIS RAKSHASAS

Still a third reason for the descent of Vishnu as Ram is set forth in the following story.

Pratapbhanu was the king of Kaikeya. Mighty and brave, he conquered the seven islands. He was also a good ruler. Once, hunting in the forest with his men he saw a boar and started chasing it. The boar led him far away into a dense forest. He had strayed away from his men and could not find the way back. Looking around he saw the ashram of a recluse close by. The exhausted king went there for rest and refreshment. One of the kings whom he had defeated in war was living in that ashram in the guise of a sadhu (ascetic). The sadhu recognized the king, but the king did not recognize the sadhu. Seeing the king the fake ascetic was happy, and promptly welcomed him. Meanwhile he made his plans to take revenge on Pratapbhanu.

The sadhu treated Pratapbhanu very kindly and won his confidence. The king at last asked the sadhu for a blessing; a troublefree reign of a hundred yugas over the whole world. The sadhu gladly "granted him the boon", on one condition that the king should guard himself from the curse of brahmins. So in order to propitiate the brahmins and to bring himself in their favour Pratapbhanu should invite one hundred thousand Brahmins and their families every day, for one year and feed them sumptuously. The sadhu himself would come to the palace and do the cooking for the guests instead of the assistant priest of the king. The king would personally serve the meals. That would please the brahmins and they would always remain loyal to him. Hearing this Pratapbhanu went to sleep, satisfied and happy.

Now, the sadhu had a demon friend called Kalaketu, a great magician. He was the one who led the king to the sadhu's ashram in the guise of a boar. At the sadhu's bidding he came to the ashram when the king was sleeping. By his magical power he brought the sleeping Pratapbhanu and his horse back to the palace and took the king's assistant priest to the sadhu's ashram.

As prearranged the sadhu came to the palace disguised as the assistant priest. He prepared the meals for king's guests, the brahmins and their families. When the king had already served the meals before the guests, a voice from heaven

warned the brahmins not to touch the food as it was contaminated by brahmins' flesh. Shocked beyond description they all stood up and cursed Pratapbhanu that he and his whole clan would be destroyed during the course of the same year. The king overcome with fear and grief ran to the kitchen to look for the sadhu, but he found neither the sadhu nor any food there. Then only the king understood the great fraud the sadhu had played on him. He fell at the feet of the brahmins, explained the whole incident and asked for forgiveness. But the curse had to take its course. In the same year Pratapbhanu was attacked by the neighbouring kings. He and all his clan perished in the war.

In due course of time Pratapbhanu and his kinsfolk were reborn as rakshasas. He himself became Ravan, his brother and minister were born as his brothers Vibhishan and Kumbhakarna respectively. The three brothers practised severe penance for a long period of time and obtained boons from god Brahma. Ravan would not die except at the hands of a man or a monkey. Vibhishan would become a great bhakta of Ram. Kumbhakarna the great eater would sleep away for six months at a stretch after every meal, as otherwise he would eat up all the food available on earth. Vishnu would descend as Ram to grant final liberation to Ravan and his rakshasa tribe.

Ravan married the virtuous and beautiful Mandodari, daughter of a great architect, the demon Maya. Ravan defeated all the gods and men and ruled gloriously in Lanka, surrounded by the rakshasas. He would send out his rakshasas to desecrate the sacrifices of those who dared to perform them in his kingdom. The gods, spirits and men lived in abject fear of Ravan and did his bidding. Dharma disappeared completely from the face of the earth. Wickedness and sin filled her.

EARTH'S COMPLAINT AND THE DESCENT OF VISHNU

Mother Earth, burdened with the weight of sin, went to the devarshi Narad and the gods to complain. They all went together to god Brahma who told them that only Vishnu could liberate her. All started to sing the praises of Vishnu.

By a voice from heaven Vishnu assured them of their deliverance from the oppression of the wicked rakshasas. Then Brahma advised the gods to take birth as monkeys to help Vishnu when he would come down to the earth. So many of the gods were born as warrior monkeys.

Meanwhile in Ayodhya the virtuous and powerful king Dasrath was reigning. He belonged to the famous Solar dynasty. He had three wives, but no sons. So he consulted his family mentor (kulguru) Vasishta who called sage Shringi and performed the sacrifice for obtaining sons. The goddess of fire appeared and gave Dasrath a pot of sweet rice in the form of prasad⁵. Half of the prasad he gave to his first wife Kausalya. Half of the remaining portion he gave Kaikeyi his second wife. The remaining portion he divided into two and placed them in the hands of Kausalya and Kaikeyi who gave them to Sumitra, the third wife of Dasrath. In due time Kausalya gave birth to Ram, Kaikeyi to Bharat and Sumitra to Lakshman and Satrughna. There was great rejoicing in the town of Ayodhya on the birth of the four sons of Dasrath.

BOYHOOD AND MARRIAGE OF RAM

When the boys had grown up, sage Viswamitra came to Dasrath and requested him to send Ram and Lakshman with him, so that they might rid him and the other munis around, of the rakshasas who were making it impossible for them to perform sacrifices. Dasrath, reluctantly sent them with Viswamitra. The lads roamed about in the forest and killed all the rakshasas in the vicinity. In their roving they came across a stone which Vishwamitra told them, was Ahilya, wife of sage Gautam. Ahilya had turned into a stone by Gautam's curse. Ram touched the stone with his foot and Ahilya, liberated from the curse, regained her original form.

Meanwhile Ram and Lakshman had grown to marriageable age. Viswamitra took them to Janakpur, where Janak, the king of Videha was preparing to conduct the swayamvara of his beautiful daughter Sita. It had been announced that she would garland the one who broke the mighty bow of Shiva, placed in the hall of swayamvara. Sita had already seen Ram

in the palace garden and had fallen in love with him. Through her prayers she obtained goddess Parvati's blessing that she would get Ram for her husband.

In the swayamvara hall many kings and princes were present. Viswamitra took Ram and Lakshman also to the hall. The kings and princes tried to break the bow but they were not able even to move it from its position. Then ten thousand of them tried together and failed. Janak, in his exasperation and disappointment, publicly swore that Sita would remain a virgin if no one succeeded to break the bow of Shiva.

Seeing all this, Lakshman got angry and asked Ram to go and break the bow. Viswamitra too gave his blessing. Ram calmly went up and lifted the bow with ease. While stringing it, lo! the bow snapped into two with such a loud thud that the worlds shook violently, the horses of Sun's chariot slipped out of their path and the gods thrust their fingers into their ears. Sita went up triumphantly and garlanded Ram.

Some of the disappointed kings whispered among themselves a plan to make war and carry Sita away by force, but no one found the courage to act. Hearing the crash of the breaking bow, sage Parasuram came running to the scene with his axe ready to kill the one who broke the bow of Shiva. Lakshman challenged the sage to a direct fight, but Ram pacified the raging Parasuram. Suddenly realizing that Ram was the avatar of Vishnu himself, Parasuram returned to his ashram singing his praises.

Janak invited Dasrath with his family and friends and the marriage of Sita and Ram was solemnised amid great rejoicing. Bharat, Lakshman and Satrugna also received brides. After enjoying several days of hospitality Dasrath and his retinue returned to Ayodhya.

Book Two: Ayodhya Kand

INTRIGUE OF KAIKEYI

Dasrath was becoming old. With Vasishta's blessing he decided to crown Ram as his successor. Preparations for his

crowning were in full swing. Seeing this the gods got frightened that if Ram became king he would forget about freeing them from the harassment of the rakshasas. They went to Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and requested her to do something to obstruct Ram's crowning. Saraswati entered Manthara, the maid servant of Kaikeyi and distorted her mind.

The evening before the day of the crowning, Manthara went to Kaikeyi and roused suspicion and jealousy in her heart. Manthara warned her that if Ram became king Bharat and she would be lifelong slaves of Ram and Kausalya. Kaikeyi fell into the trap set by Manthara. Manthara reminded Kaikeyi that some years ago Dasrath had promised her two favours which were still due. Kaikeyi should ask for these favours now, she told her. One should be to make Bharat the crown prince, and the other to send Ram to the forest for fourteen years, where he should live as an ascetic. The same night Kaikeyi played her part skilfully and wrested these favours from Dasrath, who felt himself to be bound by his promise.

Dasrath was overcome with grief. Early next morning, the expected day of Ram's crowning, he sent for Ram. Ram came and saw the situation. He was saddened by the condition of his father. He was not sorry for losing the crown. He decided to fulfil the word of his father to Kaikeyi. Moreover he was happy to go to the forest where he could meet the sages and protect them from the rakshasas. Ram tried to console his father telling him of the benefits of forest life and of the fitness of crowning Bharat. He requested Dasrath to remain unwavering in his promise to Kaikeyi. But Dasrath would not be consoled.

RAM'S DEPARTURE TO THE FOREST, DASRATH'S DEATH

Hearing of Ram's determination to go to the forest Lakshman and Sita also decided to accompany him. In spite of the affectionate words spoken by Ram and Kausalya to persuade her to remain in the palace, Sita remained firm in her resolve to follow her husband wherever he went and to share

in his sufferings whatever they might be. So the three set out for the forest, leaving the grieving family and citizens behind.

Dasrath could not reconcile himself with his separation from Ram. He sent his minister Sumant after him, with instructions to let him roam the forest for a few days with Sita and Lakshman and then to bring them back. Sumant accompanied them to Shringaverpur. He tried his best to persuade Ram to return, but without success. And Sita would not part company with Ram. Neither would Lakshman. So Sumant returned to Ayodhya without being able to fulfil the wish of Dasrath. Dasrath, unable to bear the pain of separation from Ram, died of a broken heart.

BHARAT'S VISIT TO CHITRAKOOT

Ram's first camping place was Shringaverpur. There he met Guha, the king of a forest tribe called Nishads. Guha and his people became Ram's fast friends. Leaving Shringaverpur Ram and his party went to Prayag. Guha accompanied them as their guide.

In Prayag they visited sage Bhardwaj. All the munis around came to the ashram of Bhardwaj and met Ram and paid him homage.

Leaving Prayag, they went to the ashram of sage Valmiki, who directed them to Chitrakoot where they could settle down for a time. After making the necessary arrangements for Ram's stay in Chitrakoot, Guha went back to his own place.

Meanwhile Bharat and Satrughna had returned to Ayodhya. They were shocked and saddened to learn that their father was dead and that Ram, Sita and Lakshman had left for the forest. Bharat felt very angry and bitter towards his mother who was at the root of all this tragedy. The feeling that Kaikeyi did all this for his sake filled him with unhappiness and a feeling of guilt.

Bharat performed funeral rites for his father under the guidance of Vasishtha, who tried to console him and reassure him of his innocence. However Bharat decided to go to

Ram and try to persuade him to return and take up the rule of Ayodhya. So together with Vasishtha, the queens, Sumant, a contingent of the army and many people of Ayodhya, Bharat and Satrugna set out for Chitrakoot where Ram was staying.

On their arrival at Chitrakoot Ram received them graciously. He took special pains to put Kaikeyi at ease. He assured her that he was not offended, on the contrary he was happy to have been given the opportunity to live in the forest at the service of the ascetics there. "It was indeed the god of destiny, Brahma who guided events the way they happened", concluded Ram. He showed Kaikeyi the same loyalty and affection now as before. Kaikeyi repented of her ways and was reconciled with Ram.

A few days later Janak with his family also arrived in Chitrakoot. Much consultation was held between Ram, Janak and the deputation of Bharat. Finally Ram expressed his wish to honour the promise of his father. Bharat agreed to return to Ayodhya and take up the responsibilities of kingship, in the name of Ram until his return from the forest. Bharat took back with him Ram's slippers which he would enthrone in Ayodhya as a symbol of Ram's kingship.

After visiting the ashrams around, Bharat and his party returned home. He ruled Ayodhya as a good king, but lived as an ascetic in a hut in the nearby village called Nandigram till the return of Ram. He could not bring himself to live in the comforts and luxuries of the palace while his brothers and sister-in-law were leading a life of asceticism and hardships.

Book Three: Aranyakand

RAM IN PANCHVATI

After bidding farewell to all the ascetics in and around Chitrakoot, Ram went to the ashram of sage Atri. Atri's wife Anasuya gave Sita the teaching on the duties of a good and faithful wife. From the Ashram of Atri they continued their journey through the forest. On the way they met a terrible

looking rakshas named Viradh. Ram felled him with an arrow. Thereupon Viradh regained his original beautiful form and Ram sent him to Vaikunth. Later they reached the ashram of muni Sharbhanga. The sage was so happy at the fulfilment of his long cherished ambition to meet Ram in his life time, that offering all the merits of his ascetic life at Ram's feet, he entered the fire of self-renunciation, left his body and rose to Vaikunth. Further on Ram met his great bhakta, muni Sutikshna who took them to the ashram of the great sage Agastya. Agastya directed them to the forest of Panchvati on the Godavari river. There they destroyed the rakshasas of the forest and freed the munis from their harassment.

SURPANAKHA'S ARROGANCE

When Ram, Sita and Lakshman were in the Panchvati forest, Surpanaka, a sister of Ravan, king of Lanka was roaming about in the jungle. There her eyes fell on the two brothers. The flames of passion sprang up in her. Disguising herself as a beautiful woman she approached Ram and solicited him to marriage. Ram sent her to Lakshman who cut off her nose and ears and sent her off. In pain and shame she ran to her brothers Khar and Dushan and demanded of them revenge on Ram and Lakshman. They came with numerous rakshasa soldiers to fight the two princes. In the battle that followed all the rakshasas were killed including Khar and Dushan. Ram sent them all to his own world, Vaikunth.

Seeing her brothers and their armies destroyed Surpanakha ran to Ravan and complained bitterly to him. She challenged him to take revenge on those who insulted her. Moreover she described Sita's beauty to Ravan and roused in him a strong passion for her.

Meanwhile in their hut in Panchvati Ram explained to Sita the plans of Ravan to abduct her. He advised her to enter the sacred fire and return to Vaikunth, and remain there till Ravan was vanquished. Sita entered the fire leaving her image (Mayasita) in front of the hut.

ABDUCTION OF MAYASITA

(From now on till the fire ordeal after the war in Lanka, we will be using the name Sita for Mayasita.)

By now Ravan had his plans ready to abduct Sita. He went to his friend the rakshas Mareech and sent him to Ram's hut in the form of a beautiful golden deer. Sita was attracted by the beautiful deer and requested Ram to get his skin for her. Leaving her in charge of Lakshman Ram started chasing the deer. A good distance away Ram shot him down. As he fell he imitated Ram's voice and emitted a terrible cry of distress calling Lakshman. The deer resumed his original form and remembering Ram, whose great bhakta he was, died, and rose to Vaikunth.

Hearing the cry of the dying Mareech Sita thought that something terrible was happening to Ram. She told Lakshman to run to Ram's help. Lakshman knew that Ram was not in any danger, and the cry for help was only some trick. He was unwilling to go away leaving Sita alone in the dangerous forest. But Sita was so insistent that Lakshman committed the hut and its surroundings to the protection of the gods and left in search of Ram. Seeing Sita alone Ravan came to the hut in the guise of a sadhu asking for alms. When Sita came near with the alms the sadhu resumed his true form, caught hold of Sita, put her in his heavenly chariot, Pushpak and started flying homewards to Lanka.

On the way an old eagle called Jatayu heard the pitiable wail of Sita, and surmising what was happening, flew up to Pushpak and put up a fight with Ravan. He wounded Ravan with his beak and claws and pulled him out of Pushpak. Then he took out Sita and put her on the ground and resumed the fight. But the old Jatayu was no match for Ravan. He was mortally wounded by the latter's terrible arrows. When Jatayu fell to the earth Ravan put back Sita in the chariot and resumed his flight.

After killing Mareech, Ram and Lakshman returned to the hut in all haste. Seeing the empty hut they were struck with sorrow and anxiety. Lakshman was also troubled with guilt feelings, that he had left Sita alone against the command of

Ram. Ram consoled Lakshman and both of them started on their long search for Sita. Following the blood stains left by the battle between Ravan and Jatayu, they at last found the dying eagle who told them his part of the story. Ram offered him his life back, but Jatayu preferred to die and go to Vaikunth.

Ram and Lakshman continued their journey through the dense forests infested with wild beasts and elephants. On the way he killed rakshas Kabanth and reached the ashram of Sabri. Sabri directed them to the forest near lake Pampa where sage Matanga was living. "There they should meet the leader of the monkeys, Sugriv and make friends with him. Sugriv would help them in their search for Sita", Sabri assured Ram

Book Four: Kishkinda Kand

RAM'S FRIENDSHIP WITH SUGRIV

Ram and Lakshman reached the mountain Rishyamook where Sugriv was living and hiding, with his retinue of monkeys. He was afraid of his brother Bali who had driven him away from the palace and taken his wife to himself. Seeing the two princes wandering in the forest Sugriv suspected them to be emissaries of Bali. So he sent out his messenger Hanuman to find out. Ram told Hanuman the whole story and search for Sita. Hanuman recognized Ram as the object of his devotion and fell at his feet, singing his praises. Then he took them both to Sugriv. Sugriv heard their story with tearfilled eyes and promised them all the help he could give, to rescue Sita. He gave Ram the scarf which Sita had dropped from Pushpak when she saw the monkeys on the ground.

Sugriv also told Ram how he had been treated unjustly by Bali, his brother and how Bali had thrown him out of the palace and taken his wife. On hearing this Ram told Sugriv to go with him to Bali. Sugriv challenged his brother to a fight. While both brothers were fighting Ram shot an arrow from the cover of a tree and killed Bali. Then Sugriv was installed king of the monkeys and Bali's son Angad was made the crown prince.

SUGRIV'S ARMY IN SEARCH OF SITA

Ram and Lakshman went to live in a cave near Sugriv's palace. The rainy season came and went. Still no word from Sugriv reached Ram regarding the search for Sita. Among the pleasures of the kingdom Sugriv had simply forgotten his promise. Hanuman reminded him of his forgotten promise and the army was summoned in all haste. Meanwhile Ram was angry. He sent the enraged Lakshman to Sugriv to find out the reason for his silence. Hanuman and Sugriv asked for forgiveness for the negligence and explained to Lakshman that the army had already been summoned. Then all went to Ram. In the meantime the army also arrived. It was ordered to start the search forthwith and return within a month with the news of Sita, under pain of death. With Hanuman and Angad as leaders of the party they set out on the search for Sita immediately.

The search party had already spent several wearisome days. The exhausted and thirsty monkeys with Jambavan, the bear, reached an arid place. Hanuman climbed a hill to look for water. He saw a water hole in the valley. In no time the monkeys were slaking their thirst and cooling themselves in the hole. Nearby there was a beautiful garden with a temple. A sannyasini was sitting in the temple. They went and paid her homage and told her their story. She gave them the sweet fruits of the garden which they ate to their fill. When they all were refreshed she asked them to close their eyes for a moment. By her ascetic power she transported them to the seashore over against Lanka. When they opened their eyes they found themselves standing on the beach!

By now the time given for the search was getting over. All began to feel dejected. With words of encouragement Jambavan was trying to instil courage and hope into them. An old eagle named Sampati was sitting in his cave close by and listening to all their talk. He was thinking of his good fortune of having a sumptuous feast on fresh monkey flesh after a long period of hunger. All of a sudden Angad started narrating the story of Jatayu. As soon as Sampati heard the name of Jatayu he came out of the cave. Assuring the

monkeys that he would do no harm to them he told them that he was Jatayu's brother, and narrated his own story. He said that being too old and weak he could not help them in their search for Sita. But with his sharp eyes he could see Sita sitting in the garden of Ashoka trees (Asokvan) in Lanka. "Some one will have to jump a hundred Leagues of ocean to reach Lanka", he added.

Angad was confident of jumping to Lanka, but was not sure of his ability to jump back. Then Jambavan suggested the name of Hanuman, who gladly undertook the mission. He was so enthusiastic that he was prepared to bring the whole mountain of Trikoot on which Lanka was built, together with the Asokvan and the palace of Ravan. Jambavan however told him that his mission was only to meet Sita, bring her the news of Ram and bring back her news to Ram. Ram himself would do the rest.

Book Five: Sunder Kand

HANUMAN IN LANKA

Jumping the ocean Hanuman reached Lanka. There he met Ravan's brother Vibhishan who was a bhakta of Ram. Vibhishan told him where Sita was and how to find her. Hanuman went to the Ashokvan and hid himself among the branches of a tree. He saw the sad and emaciated Sita in the garden sitting absorbed in meditation. At nightfall Ravan came with several women to persuade Sita to agree to his advances. Sita told Ravan to his face that he was a despicable and mean creature and Ram a jewel of a man. The infuriated Ravan warned Sita that if she did not give in to his wishes within a month's time she would be killed. Leaving some rakshasis to persuade her Ravan left the garden.

One of the rakshasis, the kind Trijata was a devotee of Ram. Sita begged her to make a pyre for her and set it on fire. Tactfully telling Sita that fire was not available at that time of the night she left her. Sita started praying to the ashoka tress to drop fire from their red tender leaves. Just at that moment Hanuman dropped the ring which Ram had given him to give to Sita, right in front of her. The ring shone like

fire and Sita recognized it. She began to wonder how it dropped there.

From the tree top Hanuman began singing the praises of Ram. Hearing this Sita asked him to come down. Standing before her with folded hands he told her of Ram's anguish and narrated the whole story of the search. He assured her of her quick release and reunion with Ram. Sita was very much consoled. Hanuman then asked her permission to eat some of the sweet fruits of the garden, as he was feeling very hungry. Sita warned him of the fierce guards watching the garden. Not heeding the warning he started plucking fruits and tearing away the branches. The rakshasas came running. Some of them he killed and others he hammered. They went and complained to Ravan who sent his son Akshayakumar with many soldiers. Hanuman killed him and many of his soldiers. Then Ravan sent another of his sons, Meghnath, strong and skilled in war.

After a furious fight Meghnath shot his brahmastra (arrow given by Brahma). Out of respect for the brahmastra Hanuman allowed himself to fall unconscious. Meghnath bound him with snakes and brought him to Ravan. Hanuman told Ravan that he was only a messenger and a devotee of Ram. He advised Ravan to give back Sita and fall at the feet of Ram, and ask for his pardon. Ravan was so insulted and incensed at this that he wanted to kill Hanuman. But the councillors advised against it as Hanuman was the messenger of a king. So, on Ravan's orders his tail was wound in cloth drenched in oil and lighted. Seeing his tail on fire Hanuman shrank in size, jumped to the top of Ravan's palace and set fire to it. Hopping from roof to roof he set all the houses of Lanka on fire except that of Vibhishan. Then he jumped into the sea, put out the fire on his tail and cooled himself.

Refreshed and cool, he came and stood before Sita and told her the story. Taking leave of her he requested for a sign from her to Ram. She gave him her crest jewel (choodamani). Hanuman jumped back to where Jambavan and the monkeys were anxiously waiting for him.

RETURN OF THE SEARCH PARTY

Jambavan and the monkeys were overjoyed at the success of Hanuman's mission. All returned joyously to Sugriv. He took them all to Ram and reported everything to him. Giving Ram Sita's choodamani Hanuman begged him to free Sita as quickly as possible. Choking with tears of gratitude Ram thanked him profusely.

Meanwhile in Lanka, Mandodari, Ravan's wife was pleading with him to return Sita and make peace with Ram. In the council too Vibhishan and a senior councillor pleaded for peace. Ravan was enraged at these words from Vibhishan and kicked him out of the council hall. Vibhishan ran away to Ram and asked for protection. Ram accepted him graciously and treated him as a friend and a counsellor.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

Now Ram saw that war was inevitable as Ravan would not listen to reason. He took Lakshman and the army of the monkeys and bears to the seashore over against Lanka. Now the problem arose, how to cross to Lanka. On Vibhishan's advice Ram prayed to the ocean god for three days continuously but had no hearing. At last Ram got angry and prepared himself to dry the ocean with an arrow. Then the ocean god got frightened and appeared. He asked pardon from Ram and told him that monkeys Nal and Neel had a boon that whatever they touched would float on water. With their help the bridge could easily be built over the ocean.

In the meantime Ravan wanted to find out the situation in Ram's camp and sent out a spy. He returned and advised Ravan against war. Ravan rejected all attempts for peace, with contempt. He was determined on war.

Book Six: Lanka Kand

CROSSING TO LANKA

All the monkeys and bears brought stones, trees and hills to Nal and Neel, who completed the bridge over the ocean with incredible speed. The armies of Ram crossed over to Lanka

in all haste, some flying, some riding sea monsters, others over the bridge. Hearing that Ram had already crossed the ocean, Mandodari again tried to persuade her husband to sue for peace, but in vain. Neither did Ravan listen to his councillors who spoke for peace. He was too confident of his power.

RAM WARNS RAVAN AND OFFERS PEACE

One evening, when Ravan and his friends were enjoying a concert, Ram shot an arrow from his own camp outside the city of Lanka and dropped Ravan's royal umbrella, his crowns and Mandodari's ear jewel (tatank) to the ground. It was a warning to Ravan against his arrogance. The audience was struck with fear and all dispersed forthwith. But Ravan continued in his determination to fight to the finish.

Later Ram sent Angad to Ravan to offer him peace. While Angad was going to Ravan's court one of Ravan's sons was playing near the palace. He went and gave Angad a kick. Angad caught him by his legs and smashed him dead against the ground. Reaching Ravan's court Angad told him of Ram's power and glory and advised him to sue for peace. Ravan replied that it was child's play for him to catch the two ascetics (Ram and Lakshman) and destroy all the monkeys. Enraged at this insult to Ram, Angad banged his foot against the floor and all the ten crowns of Ravan fell to the ground. Angad picked up four of them and threw them to Ram's camp, where they were waiting for Angad's return. Seeing the crowns falling the monkeys and bears got frightened thinking that stars had fallen or Ravan had thrown some of his mysterious weapons at them. But Ram set them at rest that it was Angad who threw Ravan's crowns to them.

After throwing away the crowns Angad stood in front of Ravan and planted his feet firmly on the floor. Angad challenged Ravan to move his feet if he could. Ravan tried his best, but failed. Angad then told him that he should fall at the feet of Ram, rather than hold his feet. Ravan could not be persuaded by any argument. Angad's mission failed and he returned to Ram.

THE SIEGE OF LANKA

Now that the war started the army of Ram split into four divisions and laid siege at the four gates of Ravan's castle. As Vibhishan knew Lanka well, he was of great use to Ram as a war strategist. Ram's army fought with stones, clubs, trees, uprooted mountains and their own teeth and claws. Beside all these Ravan's army had different kinds of arrows and some had even magical powers. Hanuman and Angad leaped to the top of the castle and took on Meghnath, one of the best warriors of Ravan. Meghnath let loose evil spirits by his magic power. They danced around in the battle field shouting and yelling, causing much confusion and fear in the armies of Ram. Seeing this Ram cleared the field, of the evil spirits by shooting a single arrow. Meghnath also shot different kinds of arrows at Ram which Ram cut down with ease.

LAKSHMAN'S UNCONSCIOUSNESS AND RECOVERY

The war was going on for days. Ravan had lost more than half his army. Many monkeys and bears also had died. Then Lakshman and Meghnath got locked in battle. After a terrible fight Lakshman was shot down unconscious by Meghnath. Meghnath and his army tried to carry him away, but they could not even lift him. Then Hanuman carried away Lakshman to Ram. On Jambavan's advice Hanuman was sent to bring Vaidya Sushen from Lanka. He brought Sushen and his house as well, to Ram. Sushen asked for the medicinal plant Sanjivani from a mountain far away to the north. Again Ram sent Hanuman for it. On the way rakshas Kalanemi waylaid Hanuman at the behest of Ravan. Hanuman killed Kalanemi and reached the mountain. At the mountain Hanuman could not recognize the Sanjivani. So he uprooted the whole mountain and holding it in his hands started his flight back to Lanka.

While Hanuman was passing over Ayodhya Bharat noted the unusual shape floating above. Taking it for a rakshas he shot a headless arrow at the shape. Calling the name of Ram Hanuman fell headlong to the ground, unconscious. Bharat was very much disconcerted when he saw what had hap-

pened. He tried his utmost to revive Hanuman, but without any result. Finally he took Ram's name and began invoking him for help. Hearing the name Ram, Hanuman sat up hale and hearty. He told Bharat the news in brief about the war in Lanka and losing no time flew back in all haste to Lanka, where Ram was anxiously waiting for him. Immediately Sushen administered the medicine to Lakshman and he recovered instantly. After bringing Sushen and his house back to his place Hanuman joined battle feeling happy at Ram's affectionate gratitude.

DEATH OF KUMBHAKARNA AND MEGHNAATH

Ravan's brother, the mighty Kumbhakarna was still sleeping, unaware of what was happening around him. Seeing that things were going from bad to worse, with great effort Ravan woke him, fed him on an enormous amount of buffalo meat, gave him plenty of liquor to drink and sent him to the battle field. Kumbhakarna killed many of Ram's army. Then Ram himself joined battle with him. After a fierce fight Ram killed him. When he fell dead his weight crushed many monkeys and bears to death. Ram granted him liberation. The following day Meghnath took up the command of the army. By his magical power Meghnath was demoralising Ram's army. Ram had to counter his tricks several times with his arrows. Then Meghnath took on Ram himself in the battle. After a fierce fight he bound Ram with nagpas (rope of snakes). Sage Narad, seeing this sent the eagle Garuda who ate up all the snakes and set Ram free. All the mighty warriors together could not defeat Meghnath. Finally Lakshman took him on and after a terrible fight shot him dead. Ram sent Meghnath to Valmiki.

THE CRUCIAL BATTLES

Even at this moment Ravan was unwilling to give up. He gathered together the remaining army, gave them a pep talk and led them to battle. Lakshman was shot down unconscious by Ravan. After felling Ravan with a hit by his fist Hanuman carried Lakshman to Ram who revived him instantly. Lakshman then took up fight with Ravan and shot

at him so many arrows that Ravan fell to the ground. He was taken to the palace where they nursed him back to health. Ravan then prepared for a sacrifice which would make him immortal, and nobody would be able to kill him. Vibhishan guessed what was going on and warned Ram who sent Hanuman and Angad to obstruct the sacrifice. There ensued a bloody fight and the sacrifice was desecrated.

Ravan had bad omens. Not heeding them he presented himself in the battlefield. The fighting was so fierce that rivers of blood began to flow. Evil spirits came to enjoy the eerie sight and dance in the field of corpses. The battle continued until Ravan was left alone in the field. Using all his magical powers Ravan fought on. Seeing Ram without a war chariot god Indra sent his own chariot and Matali his charioteer to Ram. Using his magic Ravan made the army of Ram see Ram and Lakshman everywhere they looked. This confused and upset them until Ram cleared the field with his arrow.

Seeing that his army was tired Ram made them sit down and rest, while he met Ravan in duel. They challenged each other and began showering numerous arrows. Ram started cutting off Ravan's heads and arms, but new heads and arms were replacing the cut off ones. Ravan then sent off so many arrows at once that Ram's chariot could not be seen. The gods were frightened and the monkeys and bears ran for shelter. Ram however was continuing cutting off Ravan's heads and arms. The heads and arms flew about in the sky challenging Ram and others to fight, and darkening the sky.

Goddess Kali came to the battlefield wearing her garland of skulls and joined the dancing spirits. Ravan shot the arrow 'Shakti' at Vibhishan. Ram pushed Vibhishan aside and cut off Ravan's arrow. Vibhishan filled with anger gave a fierce blow with his club on Ravan's chest. But this only exhausted Vibhishan. Seeing the situation Hanuman jumped in and got locked in battle with Ravan. Ravan gave Hanuman such a kick that Hanuman flew up in the sky. Catching his tail Ravan too went up. Both of them fought with such skill and courage that the gods who were watching started shouting "Vah!" and "Jai! Jai!" for both of them.

Seeing Hanuman in trouble all the monkeys rushed together and attacked Ravan. He disappeared for a moment and many Ravans reappeared on the battlefield, running around and roaring fiercely. The gods whispered among themselves in terror: "A single Ravan could defeat us all. What will happen with so many Ravans around. Let us flee to the mountain caves and hide ourselves". Only Brahma, Shiva and the wise sages knew the secret of so many Ravans. But the undaunted Hanuman, Nal, Neel and Angad kept on fighting and crushing as many of these false Ravans as they could lay hands on.

Ram smiled at the peculiar situation prevailing on the field and the discomfiture of the gods and monkeys. Shooting an arrow he cleared the field of the false Ravans. He patted his monkeys and bears affectionately and they returned to the battle with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Ravan was beating down the monkeys and bears relentlessly. Jambavan kicked Ravan with so much force that Ravan fell unconscious. He was carried to the palace and all the rakshasas sat around and nursed him back to health. Meanwhile the monkeys also regained consciousness and gathered round Ram. It was the end of the battle for the day.

In the Asokvan Sita was desperate with anxiety. She was wondering why the war was lasting so long. The kind Trijata tried to pacify and console her. She gave Sita her own explanations. They did not know how fierce the fight was and they could not guess the strength of Ravan.

The next morning Ravan came to the battle field with fresh strategies. His magic produced numberless evil spirits, ghosts and witches armed with bows, arrows and swords. They were drinking blood and wildly dancing around shouting: "Catch! Kill!" Fire blazed in several places all around. All, including even Lakshman got dispirited and started rubbing their palms together crying: "Ha Ram!" Then Ravan produced many Rams, each of them surrounded by Hanuman and the monkeys with stones in their hands ready to attack Ram. They were all shouting: "Catch him, let him not escape!" With a single arrow of Ram the illusion was

removed. All became happy and resumed their attack on Ravan.

RAVAN'S FALL

Ram was wondering how Ravan could live and fight on even after he had cut off his heads and arms numberless times, even after suffering so many terrible arrows and clubs. He looked at Vibhishan enquiringly and the latter told him the secret. Ravan had nectar in his navel that made him immortal. Hearing this Ram got the arrows ready for the final shot.

Frightening omens appeared. Jackals and dogs started howling, donkeys braying, birds making pathetic sounds. There was a glow of fire in all the ten directions. The sun eclipsed. Mandodari's heart beat wildly. Idols shed tears. Storms blew and the earth quaked. There was fierce lightning and thunder. Clouds rained hair, dust and blood. The gods and rishis were filled with fear.

Drawing the bowstring to his ear Ram shot thirtyone arrows at Ravan. One of them dried up the nectar of Ravan's navel. The other arrows cut off his heads and arms and brought and placed them in front of Mandodari. The arrows returned to the quiver after accomplishing their task. Ravan's headless body still ran about roaring: "Where is Ram? I shall kill him in war." Then Ram shot another arrow and split the body in two. The two parts grew enormous in size and fell down with such a terrible weight that countless monkeys and bears were crushed to death. On Ravan's fall, the earth shook, and the mountains trembled. The water in the rivers and oceans was troubled. The gods showered flowers on Ram and sang his praises. And Ram granted Ravan final liberation.

VIBHISHAN CROWNED KING OF LANKA

Mandodari lamented Ravan recounting his prowess and mighty deeds. Vibhishan performed the funeral rites for his brother, and returned to Ram. Ram ordered Lakshman and the army to take Vibhishan to the city of Lanka in triumphal procession and crown him king. He himself would not enter

the city as he was leading an ascetic life on the command of his father. After crowning and installing Vibhishan on the throne of Lanka, all came and gathered round Ram.

THE FIRE ORDEAL OF MAYASITA AND THE RESTORATION OF THE REAL SITA

Ram sent Hanuman to Sita to give her the good news of victory. Hearing the news Sita blessed Hanuman and requested him to do whatever was needed to bring about her reunion with Ram, as soon as possible. Hanuman came and reported everything to Ram who sent him back with Vibhishan and Angad to bring Sita. On her arrival Ram ordered a fire ordeal as Sita had remained a long time in Ravan's custody. The fire was lit and Sita consigned herself to the fire. The Mayasita was burned up. The god of fire appeared with the real Sita and presented her to Ram. Ram affectionately seated her on his left. The gods showered flowers and the goddesses mounting their heavenly chariots danced in the sky.

FAREWELL TO LANKA

On Ram's bidding god Indra showered nectar on the field of battle and all the monkeys and bears who had died in the war came to life. Ram presented all his soldiers with clothes and ornaments and thanked and praised them profusely for their heroic parts in the war. Ram, Sita and Lakshman took Vibhishan, Sugriv, Hanuman and a few other heroes of the war and boarded Pushpak, the heavenly chariot of Ravan. After bidding an affectionate farewell to the monkeys and bears and assuring them of his lasting friendship, Ram began his flight home. On the flight to Ayodhya Ram pointed out to Sita the places where important events had taken place. They stopped at Dandakarnya and Chitrakoot and visited the ascetics there. While halting at Prayag to meet Bhardwaj, Guha the king of the Nishads got the news and hastened to meet Ram near Shringaverpur. There he joined Ram's party on their flight to Ayodhya. They reached Ayodhya on the day the fourteen years of Ram's forest life was over.

Book Seven: Uttar Kand

RAMRAJYA:

Bharat was eagerly waiting in Ayodhya for Ram's return. On Ram's arrival, there was great rejoicing in the palace and the city. Bharat was the happiest of all. Ram, Bharat, Lakshman and Sita exchanged their ascetics' dress for royal robes. Among festive celebrations Ram was crowned king of Ayodhya and installed on the throne.

After six months of liberal hospitality Ram presented his friends who had accompanied him on his return journey to Ayodhya, with precious gifts and bade them an affectionate farewell. Hanuman stayed back in Ram's service. Two sons Leva and Kusha were born to Ram. They were virtuous, and beautiful like the image of Vishnu. The other brothers of Ram too had two sons each.

Ram ruled the three worlds. During his reign all were happy and contented. They enjoyed perfect health of body and peace of mind. There was abundance and prosperity all over Ram's kingdom. People loved one another. They were honest and generous, and faithful to their religious duties. All lived to their full age, enjoying peace and happiness in the rule of Ram (Ramrajya).

CHAPTER TWO

THE PERSON OF RAM

THE WORLD OF TULSIDAS

The saints of every age irrespective of race, religion or geographical boundaries are keen observers of society. Not that they are out to find fault with men and society in a spirit of self-righteousness, but they are sensitive to the evil plaguing mankind. They are not men and women who allow themselves to be carried along by the prevailing current. Caught in the current of evil, they swim against it and warn others of the danger of floating. Their words and actions, their life is a call to righteousness, a call to dharma, to personal and social reform. People like Gandhiji, Vinoba Bhave and Mother Teresa kindle the fire of political as well as spiritual change.

In Ramcharitmanas Tulsidas gives us a compact description of Kaliyuga,⁶ the fourth and last of the ages of the universe. He was indirectly describing his own times. He says:

"People despise the scriptures. They give their own interpretation to them. Parents teach their children how to fill their stomachs, but never care to show them the path of righteousness. People abandon the duties which their caste and station in life enjoin on them (varnashramadharma).⁷ The lower castes pretend to know the scriptures and teach them to others. Brahmins are greedy, illiterate and lascivious. Teachers rob the students of their money, but never try to remove their ignorance and hardships.

"Fake sadhus and ascetics abound. Locks of matted hair, long nails, dirty clothes and impure eating habits make a sannyasi. Naked body is considered as the sign of an ascetic. On losing one's wife and

property, one shaves one's head and dons the garb of a sannyasi. Sannyasis and ascetics are out to amass wealth while the householder remains poor and needy.

"Riches are the sign of nobility, and arrogance, of greatness. Those who cheat others and make money are counted smart. Truthfulness is nowhere to be found. Men are blinded by lust. They drive away their faithful wives and take other women. Women also leave their husbands and go after other men. Many are out to slander their neighbours while few possess any virtue. Rulers wallow in sinful pleasures. They punish their subjects according to their whims and fancies. In short it is a world of untruth, lust, hypocrisy and oppression of the weak".

Tulsidas lived under the tyrannical and oppressive regime of the moghuls. It is but natural that corruption and wickedness in the rulers encourage similar evils in the subjects as well. He calls his times Kailiyuga. It is a hard indictment on the world. Perhaps Tulsidas took rather a pessimistic view of his times and people owing to his own bitter experiences in life.

But instead of condemning the world and asking people to renounce it, Tulsidas calls every one to the way of dharma. It is a call to struggle against evil. Ramayan is the story of the war between Ram and Ravan, the very embodiments of good and evil respectively. A call to dharma is a call to struggle, war, against evil. This war is long and strenuous, because evil is strong like Ravan. Tulsidas speaks of the combat of life and the weapons for that combat, in his poem. However he is sure that the good will overcome evil as Ram vanquished Ravan. He is confident that finally a world of dharma, Ramrajya, the reign of love, justice and peace will come.

A. RAM THE IDEAL PERSON OF RIGHT CONDUCT

The Ram of Ramcharitmanas is the embodiment of all human virtues. He is a man of dharma, upholding the values inculcated by the scriptures and tradition (maryada pu-

rushottam). Ram is called 'the protector of the scriptures'. (setu srutipalak). This bridge built by the scriptures is the sum total of righteousness or maryada.

RAM AND THE FAMILY VIRTUES

Family is the basic unit of society. It is the hotbed of virtues as well as vices. Ramcharitmanas paints for us the virtuous family of Dasrath without glossing over its weaknesses like the intrigue of Kaikeyi and vacillation of Dasrath.

From time immemorial certain basic values have been enshrined in the Indian family, like piety towards parents, family solidarity and respect for the preceptor (guru). In the modern world of pragmatic and materialistic thinking the children think that they have acquitted themselves honourably of their responsibility towards their parents once they have arranged for their material comforts or entrusted them to some institution for the aged. The generation gap between children and parents are widening. Children think that in this age of scientific and technological progress the older generation has nothing to offer. If India has succeeded in keeping the values of filial piety intact, we have to thank the saints like Tulsidas and their teaching and example. However cracks are appearing here and there on the moral fabric of the family.

RAM'S FILIAL PIETY

Polygamy was practised among the rulers and the rich in the time of Dasrath. Dasrath himself had three wives and children from all of them. All the sons looked up to the queens as their own mothers.

It is in the story of the intrigue of Kaikeyi that one sees how Ram loved and cherished his step-mother Kaikeyi as if she were his own natural mother. He was not angry with Kaikeyi for bringing great sorrow and disaster on his father Dasrath. He accepted the forest life as the command of his father as well as his mother (step-mother), not with resentment but with joy. His great concern was that Dasrath should remain faithful to his promise to Kaikeyi.

Ram tried his best to reassure his father that all was well and

that it was for the good of all that he went to the forest, even though as a shrewd prince he could see through, that the plan of Kaikeyi was to get him out of the way and enable Bharat to establish himself as the undisputed ruler of Ayodhya.

Dasrath had very special affection for Ram, being the first born. He was pulled in two directions, by his love for Ram and his promise to Kaikeyi. As a dutiful son Ram consoled Dasrath and did not allow his vacillation to overcome him. Ram reminded that faithfulness to one's word even at the cost of one's life was the duty of a great man. And indeed this faithfulness would cost Dasrath his life. Ram consoles his father assuring him of his filial piety: "Blessed on earth is the birth of him whose life story gladdens the heart of his father. He has attained the four goals of life, to whom his father and mother are dear as his very life".

धन्य जनमु जगतीतल तासु ।

पितृहि प्रमोदु चरित सुनि जासु ॥

चारि पदारथ करतल तार्के ।

प्रिय पितु मातु प्रान सम जाके ॥ (2: 45, 1)

While taking leave of the queens before going to the forest, Ram shows equal affection to his step-mothers Kaikeyi and Sumitra as to his own mother Kausalya. His noble mother blesses him counselling him to obey the command of his father and mother (Kaikeyi) saying: "The forest will be to you like a hundred Ayodhyas as you are going there on the command of your father and mother."

जौ पितु मातु कहेउ बन जाना ।

तौ कानन सत अवध समाना ॥ (2: 55, 1)

It happens even in the best of families that relationships get strained between children and parents. So the quality of forgiveness is very important to keep the family bonds from bursting. From the very beginning of the intrigue Ram assured Kaikeyi by his words and behaviour that he had already forgiven her and kept no grudge towards her. When Kaikeyi went to Chitrakoot with Bharat, Ram took extra pains to make her feel at ease. He tried to remove her deep

guilt feelings by putting the blame for all what happened on destiny and assuring her that all was for the best. Holding her feet in his hands he entreated her to forget the past. Thus reconciliation was effected and peace restored in a remarkably short time.

When Ram met Bharat in Chitrakoot, he told the latter how obedience to one's parents, guru and master was the foundation of all dharma. Obedience supports the world of dharma as the thousand headed serpent Sesha supports this earth.

मातु पिता गुर स्वामि निदेसु ।
सकल धरम धरनीधर सेसु ॥ (2: 305, 1)

At the conclusion of the war in Lanka Dasrath came from the world of the gods to felicitate Ram. After paying homage to his father and receiving his blessing Ram gratefully attributed his victory over the invincible Ravan to the merits of his father.

तात सकल तव पुन्य प्रभाऊ ।
जीत्यो अजय निसाचर राऊ ॥ (6: 111, 2)

Feeling the tender love of his son, tears of joy started rolling down Dasrath's cheeks.

RAM AND HIS BROTHERS

Families break up due to infighting between brothers. The sisters-in-law too have a hand in that. Life together especially in joint families causes frictions. Self interest and jealousy harden these frictions into lasting enmity. This evil attacks every family in every age and society. It is more prevalent in rich and royal families where there are more spoils to share. We have seen the family of Dasrath on the brink of disaster, due to the intrigue of Kaikeyi. But things were brought to a happy end by the brothers who remained devoted to one another. Their wives too with their love and wisdom kept the family bond unbroken.

Ram trusted Bharat. He knew how good and loyal he was. During their meeting in Chitrakoot Ram confidently asked Bharat to allow him to fulfil the promise of their father to Kaikeyi by sharing with him the burden of the hour.

Bharat's share was to go back to Ayodhya and rule the country till Ram returned from the forest. This Bharat did willingly on the command of his brother. The love of Ram and Lakshman was so strong that the latter left the comforts of the palace to accompany his brother and sister-in-law to the forest, without any hesitation. Ramcharitmanas describes the affection of Ram for Lakshman on various occasions. Ram is patient with his younger brother who is very irascible. Ram pacifies Lakshman with understanding and kindness when the latter's tempers rise. He laments pitifully over the unconscious Lakshman. With trust and confidence Ram entrusts him with difficult tasks in the war with Ravan.

In most families we come across a silent and solid man. He is available in all times of need. This is Satrugna in Dasrath's family. We do not hear much about him in Ramcharitmanas, but he is the backbone of the family.

Ram is understanding towards his younger brothers. We have seen how tactfully and delicately he deals with Bharat in Chitrakoot, and how he cools down the tempers of Lakshman. Even after his coronation as king, Ram does not show his position and power when dealing with his brothers. As before he is the elder and they the younger brothers. They sit and discuss together. Ram gives them spiritual and worldly teaching. As Ram is the ideal person, the brothers are ideal brothers.

RAM THE LOVING HUSBAND

Custom allowed and even encouraged polygamy among royalty and aristocracy. However Valmiki and after him Tulsidas do not consider it ideal. Ramayan is the love story of Ram and Sita, their mutual fidelity as husband and wife and Ram's adventures in rescuing Sita. Perhaps it was in the mind of Valmiki to show up the evils of polygamy when he was describing the intrigue of Kaikeyi and its disastrous results.

Ram loves Sita dearly. He is eager to save her from all sufferings. He advises her to remain in the palace during his forest life. When he sees that Ravan was planning to abduct

her, he sends Sita to Vaikunth and creates a Mayasita in order to save her from humiliation and the misery of being under Ravan. Sita too is a very loving and devoted wife. She thinks nothing of the troubles of forest life as long as she could be with her husband. Perhaps much of the romance of the story is lost by the creation of Mayasita. As Anasuya the wife of sage Atri says to Sita: "All good women who remember your name will remain devoted to their husbands".

सुनु सीता तव नाम सुमिरि नारि पतिव्रत करहि । (3: 5)

RESPECT AND DEVOTION TO THE PRECEPTOR

In ancient times it was the custom of rulers and rich people in India to keep learned men in their homes as family preceptors (kulgurus). They formed part of the family. Even now many people have a family preceptor whom they consult on important matters. He is listened to in all major decisions. Keeping the gurus in their own homes is going out of vogue due to economic and other reasons.

In royal families the kulguru was in charge of the education of the princes. Sage Vasishtha was the kulguru of Desrath's family. We have seen how great honour and respect were accorded him by Dasrath and his sons. In Chitrakoot Ram commends Bharat to the special protection and guidance of Vasishtha.

The great sage Viswamitra had taken Ram and Lakshman to his ashram while they were still growing lads. Viswamitra guided them in their activities in the forest, and instructed them in the scriptures. He took them to the swayamvara of Sita and was the main cause of the marriage of Sita and Ram, and the other brothers. Kausalya attributes all the superhuman attainments of Ram to Viswamitra's blessing.

मुनि प्रसाद बलि तात तुम्हारी ।

ईस अनेक करवरे टारी ।। (1: 356)

During the forest life Ram visited many ashrams to seek advice and blessing from the sages there. While he was king in Ayodhya he showed great deference to the sages and ascetics who visited him.

RAM A MAN OF HIS WORD

We have seen how Ram was helping his wavering father keep his word to Kaikeyi. Dasrath himself was proud of the honourable tradition of his dynasty, faithfulness to the given word. Men of this dynasty would rather sacrifice their lives than break their word.

रघुकुल रीति सदा चलि आई ।

प्राण जाहुँ बरु बचनु न जाई ॥ (2: 27, 2)

But parting with Ram proved too much for him. He was even ready to break his promise to keep Ram near him. But the hardheaded Kaikeyi cruelly reminded her husband: "When it comes to keeping the word, a man of truth despises whatever stands in the way, possessions, home, sons, the whole world, wife and his own body (life). He counts them as worthless grass".

तनु तिय तनय धामु धनु धरनी ।

सत्यसंघ कहूँ तू न सम बरनी ॥ (2: 34, 4)

This touched Dasrath to the quick and he kept his word, though Kaikeyi's demands appeared to him unjust. Under stress of emotions Dasrath tried to compromise on his word, by recalling Ram after a few days of wandering in the forest. But Ram remained steadfast in his determination to keep his father's word even in the face of his fathers' vacillation. Thus he saved Dasrath from breaking his word, even though it cost him his life. When Bharat came to plead for his return to Ayodhya Ram's main argument was: "Being sons of the Solar dynasty let us redeem the pledge of our father". This carried weight also with Bharat. As for Ram his greatness did not consist in making many promises as kings and political leaders do, but being loyal to his pledged word. His friendship too had the quality of pledged word. His loyalty to his friends was lasting. This we see in his relationship with Sugriv, Vibhishan, Guha, Hanuman and others.

RAM'S FRIENDLINESS

Ram was a friendly and lovable person. Guha and his forest tribe, the Nishads, welcomed him in the forest of Shringaverpur. He made a lasting friendship with them during his

short stay there. Guha became his guide to Chitrakoot and was one of his most trusted friends. So also the other forest tribes whom Ram met during his many wanderings, became his good friends. Their admiration for Ram and compassion for Sita are beautifully described by Tulsidas. Ram was always pleased with them and thankful for the simple services they did for him. He and his guests gratefully accepted even the most ordinary gifts of roots and fruits those poor people offered them. The monkeys and bears too became his fast friends and dutiful soldiers. Even Rakshas Vibhishan found a good and trustworthy friend in Ram. In making friends Ram never considered caste or rank.

It is good here to remember that in Indian puranic literature, often wicked and uncouth people were called rakshasas. Poetic imagination could surely give them ten heads, twenty hands and superhuman strength. The monkeys and bears we meet in the Ramayan may have been hill tribes who had the monkey or bear as their totem symbol. If we accept this view, we see that Ram's friendliness extended even to the hill tribes and non-Aryans.

THE OTHER VIRTUES OF RAM

Two of the most lovable characteristics which distinguish great men are their humility and meekness. The Ram of Tulsidas is a meek and humble man. The story of the boatman is a very striking example. Leaving Shringaverpur for Prayag Ram and his party had to cross the river Ganges with the help of a poor boatman. The boatman took him over the river with great love and respect. Reaching the other shore Ram felt embarrassed wondering whether he should give some remuneration to the boatman. He was afraid of offending him by paying him for such a spontaneous act of kindness and friendship. He was not proud of his status as a prince of a powerful royal family, but sensitive to the feelings of a poor boatman.

Ram never boasted of his power even to his enemies, nor was he out to show his skill or strength. He was self effacing before sages and ascetics, and even before his friends.

Ram never took his friends or servants for granted. He expressed his thanks profusely and with unstinted candour for the least services rendered to him. On Hanuman's return from Lanka with the news of Sita Ram embraced him and with tears in his eyes looked at him and said: "I shall never be able to thank you enough, my son".

सुनु सुत तोहि उरिन मैं नाहीं । (5: 31, 4)

Likewise he was profuse in thanking the armies of the monkeys and bears for the brave battles they fought for him. He brought back to life all the dead soldiers and rewarded them generously for their services. Ram gave them the credit for the victory in Lanka rather than to his own power and skill.

Ram was a man of compassion. We have several instances in Ramcharitmanas of the compassion of Ram. When Ram and the army had to cross over to Lanka, Lakshman asked Ram to dry up the ocean with an arrow. Even though Ram could do so easily, he chose to pray to the ocean god for advice so that he could spare the ocean the pain of getting dry. Ram's eyes filled with tears when he saw others suffering. He treated his mother and other queens with great kindness and delicacy. Ram stroked the wounded and tired monkeys and bears restoring them to health and vigour. When he saw the soldiers exhausted he made them sit and rest taking the whole brunt of the fight on himself. During the search for Sita his heart frequently filled with sadness thinking of her sufferings.

His kindness was not limited to his friends, but it flowed over to strangers and to his enemies as well. He granted his own abode Vaikunth to Ravan and all the rakshasas who died in the war. He forgave all his enemies and Kaikeyi who caused him so much suffering, never wanting to take any revenge.

Ram was the protector of the weak. As a Kshatriya it was his duty to go out and challenge the rakshasas who were harassing the ascetics and the people. As he moved around in the forest he killed all the rakshasas and freed the people from their oppression.

Ram was a man of peace. His arrows were meant only for the wicked in order to protect the weak. Before going out to war with Ravan he offered him peace through Angad his messenger. When he saw that Ravan was still bent on war he gave him a warning by shooting down his royal umbrella and crowns, thereby giving him a sign of his extraordinary power. The war started only when Ravan did not heed even this last warning.

As a noble Kshatriya Ram was fair in war. Therefore it is difficult to understand why he shot Bali, brother of Sugriv, from cover of a tree. Tulsidas gives some explanations though not very convincing. First, that it was to punish Bali for taking to himself his younger brother's wife. Secondly that Ram killed Bali to keep his promise to his friend Sugriv. Further that Ram offered Bali his life back after he was struck with the fatal arrow. But all this could have been done after challenging Bali to an open fight.

TULSIDAS' TEACHING ON RIGHTEOUSNESS (DHARMA)

Through his teaching and example Tulsidas calls the people to the way of righteousness. The tragic death of Dasrath and the highly dramatic situation in the palace on the return of Bharat gives Vasishtha an occasion to raise some basic questions on dharma. What is dharma or righteousness? What is the meaning, the fulfilment, of life? What is the difference between a good and evil life? Vasishtha poses these questions to the grieving Bharat and he himself gives the answer. He consoles Bharat telling him that Dasrath's life was a noble and fulfilled one. His death as well as his life were equally glorious. The quality of life defines the quality of death. The question is not how a person dies, but rather how he lives. So it is not right for Bharat to grieve over Dasrath's death.

But there are many wicked persons for whom we have to be sorry, over whom one must grieve. They go against the dictates of dharma. Vasishtha lists them according to the duties of caste and state of life (varnashramadharma). He says: "The brahmin who does not cherish the scriptures, but gives himself up to lust, the king (kshatriya) who does not

love his subjects, the rich but miserly vaishya who is not hospitable and is not devoted to Shiva, the arrogant and talkative sudra who considers himself learned and is ambitious for honour and despises the brahmins, the crooked and wayward woman unfaithful to her husband, the religious student (brahmachari) who relinquishes his vows and disobeys his guru, the householder who neglects his responsibility towards his family, the anchorite (vanaprasta) who gives up asceticism and is in love with comforts and luxury, the sannyasi who abandoning his search for spiritual wisdom goes after the things of this world, the slanderer, the angry and resentful, the person who does not love his parents and family, the selfish, the unkind, the wicked, and most of all, he who is not devoted to Vishnu; all these lead lamentable lives. You should grieve over them, oh Bharat; but not over Dasrath who was a glorious king dedicated to dharma. He has won glory here in this world and in the next. He should be the object of your praise, not mourning".

(see Ramcharitmanas, Book 2, 171 to 172, 4.)

Life on earth is a war. A good man has to wage war against the forces of evil. For that, he needs a chariot of righteousness and spiritual weaponry. Through the words of Ram, Tulsidas describes this chariot and weaponry. At the height of battle between Ram and Ravan, Ram was without a chariot, while Ravan was fighting from his chariot. As we know a chariot is a great support to a fighting soldier. Seeing this highly vulnerable position of Ram, Vibhishan expressed his great anxiety. Ram made use of this opportunity to draw Vibhishan's attention to the truth that he was fighting his battle from the chariot of dharma. The battle of life in which all human beings are engaged should be fought from the chariot of dharma, armed with spiritual weapons.

Ram says to Vibhishan: "This world of illusions tries to ensnare man. He has to put up a strenuous fight with the forces of evil. The chariot and weaponry which bring one victory in this war of life are quite different from those used in ordinary wars.

"The wheels of this chariot are courage and fortitude. Its banner and standard are truthfulness and a virtuous character. Strength of will, wisdom, self-control and concern for others are the four horses. They are yoked to the chariot with the ropes of patience, kindness and equanimity. Devotion to God is the charioteer. Detachment is the shield and contentment, the sword. Liberality is the battle axe and intelligence, the fierce lance. Spiritual discernment is the unbreakable bow, and a pure and steady mind is the quiver. Serenity, self-control and religious observances are the different kinds of arrows. Veneration of the Brahmins and gurus is the impenetrable armour.

"A person equipped with such a chariot and such weapons of dharma is invincible. No enemy on earth can defeat him".

सखा धर्ममय अस रथ जाकै ।

'जीतन कहँ न कतहुँ रिपु तारै ॥ (6: 79, 6)

Ram himself is the embodiment of dharma, the Marylada Purushottam. Watching his conduct, even his own guru, the great sage Vasishtha is filled with wonder and bewilderment.

देखि देखि आचरन तुम्हारा ।

होत मोह मम हृदयँ अपारा ॥ (7: 47, 2)

B. RAM AS A NIRGUNABRAHMAN

In the foregoing paragraphs we have seen Ram as the ideal of all human virtues and a person of right conduct, the Marylada Purushottam. We have also mentioned earlier (see page 6) that he became the source of inspiration to thousands of millions to lead a virtuous life. In India he has come to be considered as the descent of god Vishnu.

Tulsidas goes a step further and considers Ram as the descent of the Absolute Being, the Nirgunabrahman itself.

राम ब्रह्म परमारथ रूपा ।

अबिगत अलख अनादि अनूपा ॥

सकल बिकार रहित गतभेदा ।

कहि नित नेति निरूपहिँ बेदा ॥ (2: 92, 4)

(Ram is the Absolute Reality, the Ultimate Meaning is everything. He is the Unknown, the Imperceptible, the Beginningless. He is incomparable, unchangeable and indivisible. The scriptures speak of him only by way of negation, "Not this" (neti).

Ram is pure awareness (vishudha bodha vigraha). He is the Fire burning away all sorrows (samasta dukha tapaha). Serenity itself, he is eternal. He gives liberation from the cycle of transmigration and bestows peace (Nirvana shanti-prada). He is sinless and beyond all senses (amogha, agochara). He is present in creation but distinct from it as the sun is different from its heat. Ram is supremely happy and contented, glorious and praiseworthy. He upholds the universe. His will always finds fulfilment. He is desireless and perfect in every way. He is Truth itself.

When Ram visited sage Valmiki in the forest the sage told him that even the great gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva could not know the mystery that is Ram. Then how could any one else know him, who was the very descent of Nirgunabrahman?

तेउ न जानहिं मरमु तुम्हारा ।

और तुम्हारे को जाननिहारा ॥ (2: 126, 1)

C. RAM THE SAGUNABRAHMAN

The Nirgunabrahman, through his mysterious power 'Maya' creates and sustains the universe, which is a manifestation of the Absolute. Then we speak of him as Sagunabrahman. To the bhaktas the Absolute Reality appears as Sagunabrahman. He appears to them, as if endowed with attributes.

Let us see how Tulsidas depicts Ram as Sagunabrahman.

Ram is the lord of Maya. He makes everything in this universe dance like wooden puppets.

उमा दारु जोषित की नाई ।

सबहि नचावत रामु गोसाई ॥ (4: 10, 4)

"The whole world is a sport. You, oh Ram, watch the sport. You make the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva dance to your tune".

जगु पेखन तुम्ह देखनिहारे ।
बिधि हरि संभु नचावनिहारे ॥ (२: 126, 1)

The whole universe is the sport of Sagunabrahman, including the various descents of God Vishnu on this earth. The Sagunabrahman himself is the player and the watcher of this sport (lila). We can get some idea of this lila from an incident during the infancy of Ram.

Once Kausalya put infant Ram to sleep in his bedroom and went to worship the household gods. To her surprise she saw there Ram, eating the food she had offered to the gods. Frightened she ran back to the bedroom where she found the child sleeping peacefully. She stood there wonderstruck. She thought that she was having a hallucination. Instantly Ram woke up and gave her a sweet smile. All of a sudden he was transfigured and he appeared to her in his divine form. She saw in him countless universes, each inhabited by its own Brahmas and Shivas. She saw in it the immense power of illusion (Maya) making the embodied souls dance to her fancy. She saw there Bhakti too freeing the souls from the meshes of Illusion. Kausalya began to tremble with fear. Ram consoled her and resumed his form as an infant. Kausalya had seen the lord of Maya.

Before the war of Lanka began Ravan was behaving as if Ram was an ordinary kshatriya warrior. To make him realise that Ram was really the descent of Sagunabrahman himself, Ravan's wife Mandodari drew a word-picture of Ram describing him as a being of immense power and magnitude. She told him: "The different parts of the universe are but his limbs and organs. The power of Illusion is his laughter. Creation, preservation and destruction are his mere gestures. The whole world is just a manifestation of Ram."

Angad, the envoy of Ram to Ravan insisted on the latter not to consider Ram as a mere man, but to acknowledge him as the Lord of the universe, the descent of Sagunabrahman himself.

Tulsidas tries to describe the glory of Ram through the words of the sage and devotee, Kakabhushundi to the eagle

Garuda. Kakabhushundi says: "Even the vast scriptures, the thousand headed Sesha and Shiva himself cannot adequately sing the praises of Ram. I am only telling you what I have heard from learned and holy men.

"Ram's beauty surpasses the combined beauty of numberless love gods (Kamadevas). His might in battle exceeds the might of countless Durgas. His fame and glory is far above the fame and glory of thousands of Indras. He is so vast that millions of heavens cannot contain him. He allays all fear from the hearts of men. He is immeasurably deeper than the nethermost world and immensely more terrible than Yama, the god of death.

"Countless pilgrimages cannot purify man, as Ram can purify his devotees. His favours to them are limitless. The very goddess of wisdom, Saraswati is but a pale reflection of Ram's wisdom. Ram is more majestic than any ocean and firmer than any mountain. The immense power of creation, preservation and destruction of worlds, the power of Maya, is but an infinitesimal part of the power of Ram. The abundant riches of this universe is but a faint shadow of his riches. Instead of comparing the attributes of Sagunabrahman with things and gods we can better say that the lord of this universe is infinite and incomparable.

निरवधि निरूपम प्रभु जगदीसा । (7: 91, 4)'

D. RAM THE DESCENT OF SAGUNABRAHMAN, THE OBJECT OF BHAKTI

We have already said that the Nirgunabrahman through his mysterious creative power, Maya, appears as Sagunabrahman. The inanimate and animate creation allow us only a glimpse of the Absolute reality. So even the Sagunabrahman is out of human reach. Man is like a child away from its mother. Human beings, though having their very being in the Absolute Reality are still far away from it in as far as they have no grasp of the Absolute, they are not sure whether this Immense Power is concerned with their lives, their world, their joys and sorrows, their problems. Like helpless infants they cannot reach Paramatman, but Paramatman can

reach out to the human beings, just as a mother can reach out to her child.

The descent, avatar, of Sagunabrahman into this world of ours is his reaching out to us in condescending love. He becomes tangible to human beings, an object of their experience, love and devotion. There are many stories of this reaching out of God to man. It is the traditional belief of the Hindus that god Vishnu has taken many avatars. There is no agreement however as to the number and identity of these avatars. The Puranas describe the various descents of Vishnu, their goals and the manner in which those goals were attained. An old Sanskrit verse enumerates the ten avatars as follows:

मत्स्यः कूर्मो वराहश्च नरसिंहश्च वामनः
रामो रामश्च रामश्च कृष्णः कल्किर जनादनः ।

Janardan (god Vishnu) has descended in the form of a fish, a tortoise and a boar. He has taken descent in the form of a lion-man (narsimha), a dwarf, Parsram, Shri Ram (son of Dasrath) and Balram. He has come as Krishna. He will come in the form of Kalki (to initiate the process of destruction, pralaya).

Of all the avatars Shri Ram and Krishna are the most important. They have found place in the hearts of people and are objects of popular devotion.

Before discussing the teaching of Tulsidas on Ram as an avatar, I would like to point out a problem which an attentive reader of Ramcharitmanas may meet with. In the Balkand, while discussing the reasons for the avatar of Ram it is said that Vishnu promised Manu and his wife Satrupa to come to the world as their son. The same god Vishnu gave word to mother Earth that he would descent to her and free her from the oppression of the rakshasas. It was again Vishnu who was cursed by Narad to descent as man. Further we see that Ram sends his bhaktas to Vaikunth, the abode of Vishnu. On the other hand we read in Ramcharitmanas that Ram makes the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva dance like puppets. He is immensely more powerful than countless Vishnus.

The question arises, is god Vishnu identical with Paramatman (Parabrahman), Sagunabrahman? How can we reconcile the different statements of Tulsidas? If Vishnu is not Sagunabrahman himself, who then is the object of bhakti? What is the final goal of bhakti, to reach Vaikunth or attain unalloyed devotion to parabrahman? To attempt an answer to these questions will require a separate treatise. Tulsidas himself does not pose these questions, but he considers Ram as the Descent of Paramatman himself and the goal of bhakti, the attainment of unalloyed devotion to Ram, the Parabrahman.

Tulsidas' thoughts on Ram as the object of our bhakti may be summarised in the following points:

Ram is the avatar of Parabrahman himself.

He assumed the human form out of condescending love for the human beings. Even though he possesses all the virtues in infinite measure, he deigns to share their weakness.

He takes even sinners and his own enemies into his protection and liberates them from the ocean of transmigration

His human conduct is a sport (lila). He is not really man, but only appears to be one. His body is a *lilatanu*, a mere appearance of body (literally, a sport body).

Paramatman is gracious and is in love with his devotees. It is for them that he assumes human form.

सो केवल भगतन हित लागी ।

परम कृपाल प्रनत अनुरागी ॥ (1: 12, 3)¹

Ram appears weak like ordinary mortals. He seems to be as dependent on others as any other human being. During his wanderings in the forest, Ram and his party came to the Ganges, tired and weary from their long and arduous journey. They refreshed themselves bathing in the cool water of the holy river. Tulsidas wonders how weariness could affect him, whose very remembrance relieves the human beings of the severe exhaustion of sansara. Tulsidas

himself answers that his weariness was only an imitation of the ways of the world.

सुमिरत जाहि मिटइ श्रम भारु ।
तेहि श्रम यह लौकिक व्यवहारु ॥ (2: 86, 4)

Again on leaving Shringaverpur he came to the Ganges to cross to the other bank. The same Ram, who in his avatar as a Dwarf (Vamana)⁸ had covered the whole universe in less than three steps, he whose name just once remembered, carries the creatures over the vast ocean of transmigration, was now looking helplessly to the boatman to take him over the river.

जासु नाम सुमिरत एक बारा ।
उतरहिं नर भवसिंघु अपारा ॥
सोइ कृपालु केवटहि निहोरा ।
जेहिं जगु किय तिहु पाहु ते थोरा ॥ (2: 100, 2)

Ram did all this because of his condescending love. He wants to show how close he is to his devotees. The glorious Lord bends low to them to make them happy, because he is the fountain of happiness and mercy. "Why should we not worship such a gracious one, giving up all arrogance, pride and worldly attachment?" asks Tulsidas.

Ram's purpose in assuming human form was not to punish the wicked and the sinners, but to save them. Even sinners who but remember his name will cross this immense ocean of sansara.

पापिउ जा कर नाम सुमिरहीं ।
अति अपार भवसागर तरहीं ॥ (4: 28, 2)

Ram's enemies, the rakshasas too received liberation from him. The very arrows which brought them death also gave them release. On his way to Chitrakoot Bharat was much consoled, thinking of Ram's goodness towards his enemies. Ram would not bring harm even on his own enemies.

अरिहुक अनभल कीन्ह न रामा । (2: 182, 3)

His mercy to those who suffer is purely gratuitous.

बिनु कारन दीन दयाल हितं । (6 : 110, Chhand 6)

Ram is constantly active for the liberation of the world. He destroys the evil effects of passion and sin and frees human beings from the bonds of illusion.

भव तारन कारन काज परं ।

मन संभव दारुन दोष हरं ॥ (6: 110, Chhand 6)

All Ram's activity is but the sport of the Almighty. Through the words of Kakabhushundi to Garuda, Tulsidas explains how Ram could appear as an ordinary man: "Lord Ram assumed the body of a king for the sake of his devotees. His actions were supremely holy and wonderful. As in a drama the actors assume different characters, but remain themselves, so Ram is the same unchangeable and impassable Parabrahman even while appearing as an ordinary mortal".

After describing at length the lamentation of Ram over the unconscious Lakshman, Shiva tells Parvati that Ram lamented over his brother in the manner of ordinary men, just for the sake of his devotees. He wanted to show them his compassion. Ram himself is beyond passion and suffering, he is the Indivisible Reality, the One without a second.

उमा एक अखंड रघुराई ।

नर गति भ्रात कृपाल देखाई ॥ (6: 60, 9)

E. DEVOTION TO THE NAME OF RAM (NAMOPASANA)

According to Tulsidas Nirgunabrahman is incomprehensibly beyond the finite puny human beings. He comes closer to us in his Saguna form, Parabrahman turned to us. But Sagunabrahman too is absolute and transcendent. He comes still closer to us in his avataric form, Ram, the son of Dasrath. However Ram is no more with us, human beings. So he continues to live among us and act within us through his holy name which is identical with Ram himself. Tulsidas explains this identity through the analogy of fire.

Fire hidden in the wood and that which springs to flame are

the same. The only difference is that we can see the one and not the other. But both are beyond our understanding. Similarly the Nirgunabrahman like the hidden fire and the Sagunabrahman like the flame, in the avataric form of Ram, both transcend us. The constant and devout recitation of the holy name of Ram brings us the experience of both Nirgunabrahman and Sagunabrahman. So Tulsidas the mystic, using poetic exaggeration says, that the name Ram is greater than Ram and Parabrahman too. By this he means that the recitation of Ramnam is more conducive to attain bhakti and experience of Parabrahman than any philosophical or spiritual quest.

Tulsidas explains the close relationship between the name and the person of Ram further, through the analogy of master and servant. As a servant accompanies his master so Ram accompanies his name. It is only the enlightened, who grasp this intimate relationship, because the name as well as the form (person) are indeed the ineffable and eternal attributes of Sagunabrahman.

समझत सरिस नाम अरु नामी ।
 प्रीति परसपर प्रभु अनुगामी ॥
 नाम रूप दुइ ईस उपाधी ।
 अकथ अनादि सुसामुझि साधी ॥ (1: 201)

Repeating the Name with spontaneous love the bhakta becomes the very fountain of happiness.

नामु सप्रेम जपत अनयासा ।
 भगत होहिं मुद मंगल बासा ॥ (1: 23, 1)

To find out the value of a gem one must examine it diligently. So also only by constant recitation of and meditation on Ramnam (name of Ram), can one appreciate the greatness of the Name.

नाम निरूपम नाम जतन तैं ।
 सोउ प्राटत जिमि मोल रतन तैं ॥ (1: 22, 4)

It is because they understand the greatness of Ramnam that the holy ascetics, detached from all desire and passion for

created things, keep awake in the night of ignorance and illusion, muttering the name Ram with their lips. They indeed experience the inexpressible, pure and mysterious bliss of Parabrahman (brahmasukh).

नाम जीहँ जपि जागहि जोगी ।
 बिरति बिरंचि प्रपंच बियोगी ॥
 ब्रह्मसुखहि अनुभवहिं अनुपा ।
 अकथ अनामय नाम न रूपा ॥ (1: 21, 1)

Tulsidas compares the lips to the threshold of the door to the soul. By keeping the shining gem, Ramnam, on this threshold (muttering the sacred Name with the lips) the soul and its surroundings are flooded with light.

राम नाम मनिदीप धरू जीह देहरी द्वार ।
 तुलसी भीतर बाहेरहुँ जौँ चाहसि उजिआर ॥ (1: 21)

Ramnam is the most sacred word (mahamantra) Shiva recites in Kashi. He whispers it in the ears of those who die in Kashi and they are released from the ocean of transmigration. Uttering 'Ram' once, is as meritorious as reciting the thousand names of Vishnu. Shiva experienced the power of Ramnam when he drank the dreaded poison, kalkoot, emitted by the serpent Vasuki. Remembering the name he swallowed the whole poison, and lo! it turned into lifegiving nectar in his mouth.

A story is told about Valmiki. He was a robber. Once he came across the famous seven sages (Saptarshi) in the forest. He wanted to rob them, but they brought about his conversion and persuaded him to utter the name of Ram. Being a sinner he could not pronounce the holy Name correctly. He repeated "Mara Mara..." and became a holy and wise man, the great poet who wrote the Ramayan.

Tulsidas says about himself that he was a sinner like the poisonous opium poppy but by the remembrance of Ram's name he became a holy basil plant (a good and saintly man).

जो सुमिरत भयो भौंग तैं तुलसी तुलसीदासु ॥ (1: 26)

Tulsidas goes on singing the praises of Ramnam using all his poetic skill, inspired by bhakti. Ramnam is the cause of fire and sun. It contains in itself all the gods, including Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It is sweet on the tongue and music in the ears. It attracts the bhaktas as honey attracts the bees. It is as dear to Tulsidas as Ram and Lakshman themselves. It makes him flourish like the rice plants in the months of Shravana and Bhadrapada (the two rainy months consisting of part of July, all August and part of September). Likewise Ramnam nourishes bhakti in the heart of every person.

Why is it that a single recitation of the Name is as meritorious as the recitation of the thousand names of Vishnu? Why is Ramnam exalted far above the other names of God? The following story explains this. Once sage Narad went to Ram to ask for a very special boon. He wanted that the name of Ram should excel all other names, that it should shine like the beautiful moon in the blue sky of the devotees' hearts surrounded by the other divine names shining like stars. Ram gladly granted the boon.

While singing the glory of Ramnam Tulsidas soars to poetical heights. He says: "While "Ram freed only one woman (Ahilya) from her curse, his name liberates countless wicked women and men. Whereas Ram in his lifetime protected Viswamitra and some other munis from the harassment of the rakshasas, his name destroys all the dark powers of sin, passion and sorrow, the veritable rakshasas who harass his bhaktas. Ram broke the bow of Shiva, but his name breaks the immensely more formidable bow, the fear of sansara. Ram's presence made the forest of Dandaka pleasant and charming, while his bhaktas' hearts become pure and beautiful by the very remembrance of his name. Ram himself destroyed the hoardes of rakshasas, but his name destroys the vastly greater hoardes of the evils of Kaliyuga.

"During his life time Ram gave moksha to many, but the number of those who attain moksha by uttering his name is infinite. Ram took the sinners Sugriv and Vibhishan into his protection, but his name gives refuge to innumerable

sinners. Ram and his army had to work hard to build a bridge over the ocean to reach Lanka. But his name dries up the vast ocean of sansara so that all can comfortably walk through the ocean dryshod to their final liberation. Ram had to wage a terrible war to kill Ravan and bring Sita home. His devotees gain easy victory over the mighty forces of passion by the power of his name and bring the 'Sita' of peace and joy to their hearts.

Ram's name gives boons to the gods who themselves are the very givers of boons. Shiva became immortal by reciting the name of Ram. Hanuman muttering the holy name keeps Ram in his power. The ascetics and the saints ascend the heights of holiness and attain liberation by the recitation of Ramnam.

In all the four ages and in all the worlds Ramnam has been liberating people. But Ramnam has a very special relevance in Kaliyuga. In satyuga people contemplated Parabrahman, in tretayuga they performed sacrifices, in dwapara yuga they worshipped God with sacred rites. But the present age of Kali is a ocean of sin in which people swim like fish. In this tragic age their only support is Ramnam. This Name protects them in this present age and showers blessing on them in the next. Kaliyuga is like the very embodiment of deceit rakshas Kalanemi and Ramnam the wise and skilful Hanuman who killed him. It is useless to count on wisdom, virtue or good works in Kaliyuga. The only hope is the name of Ram.

नहि कलि करम न भगति बिबेकू ।

राम नाम अवलंबन एकू ॥

कालनेमि कलि कपट निधानू ।

नाम सुमति समरथ हनुमानू ॥ (1: 26, 4)

CHAPTER THREE

BHAKTI

Section One

ABHEDA BHAKTI AND BHEDA BHAKTI

Even though we cannot go into the depths of the advaita system of Vedanta philosophy it is necessary here to state one of the main tenets of Vedanta in order to understand the difference between abheda Bhakti and Bheda bhakti. According to advaita system there is only the One and the Absolute Reality, the Parabrahman, the Universal Self. The Individual Self is identical with the Universal Self. Ignorance envelops the Individual Self. This ignorance causes the mind to perceive an independent reality in one's own self and the creation around. This veil of ignorance is gradually removed by assiduous quest for spiritual wisdom (Jnana or Gyana as is spelled in Ramcharitmanas). When a person realizes the identity of his own self and the universe, with the Absolute Reality, he is liberated and attains his final goal, Kaivalya or Moksha. This quest for this self realization and union with the Prammatman (Parabrahman) through spiritual wisdom is called the Path of knowledge (Gyanamarga). As Gyanamarga does not recognize any distinction (bheda) between the Individual Self and the Universal Self as subject and object of devotion, so gyanamarga is called abheda bhakti. The goal of abheda bhakti is Kaivalya, the realization of the identity of one's own Self with Paramatman.

Bheda bhakti on the other hand distinguishes the object of bhakti from the bhakta himself. Paramatman reveals himself through his mysterious creative power, Maya, as Sagunabrahman. By the assumption of human or any other form Sagunabrahman becomes a tangible reality. Even in his human descent Sagunabrahman remains a mystery. That

is why Tulsidas says that both Nirguna and Saguna are beyond our comprehension. Even the greatest of the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva cannot understand this mystery of Brahman.

Loving devotion to Sagunabrahman in his avataric form is called bheda bhakti. Here the object of devotion, Sagunabrahman is distinct from the devotee himself. To a bhakta, Paramatman is his master, friend, parent, child or spouse. Tulsidas advocates bheda bhakti in Ramcharitmanas.

The goal of bheda bhakti is not Kaivalya or Moksha. Its goal is the ever deepening unalloyed devotion (ananya bhakti) to Paramatman. The great bhaktas prefer Ananya bhakti to Kaivalya.

The way of bheda bhakti to the final goal is called the Path of Devotion (Bhakti marga). Besides Gyanamarga and bhaktimarga there is a third way to attain the final goal of liberation from the cycle of transmigration, the way of disinterested duty and service (nishkama karma) the Path of Action (Karma marga). Tulsidas considers gyanamarga and karma marga as integral parts of bhakti marga. Bhakti is the strong current carrying a person to the Supreme Being, Paramatman. He compares it to the holy river Ganges, while Saraswati and Jamuna the tributaries are gyanamarga and karmamarga respectively.

Rambhakti (devotion to Ram) is the Ganges, the river of the gods, the quest for the knowledge of the Absolute (Brahma-vichar) is the Saraswati, the rightly performed actions which destroy the evils of Kaliyuga is the Yamuna, the daughter of the sun.

राम भक्ति जहँ सुरसरि धारा ।
सरसइ ब्रह्म बिचार प्रचारा ॥
बिधि निषेधमय कलि मल हरनी ।
करम कथा रबिनंदनि बरनी ॥ (1: 1, 4, 5)

Sage Vasishtha speaking to the wise and learned king Janak of the need of knowledge for a man of devotion says: "Bhakti without gyan is like a ship without a rudder".

सोह न राम पेम बिनु ग्यानु ।
करनधार बिनु जिमि जलजानू ॥ (2: 276, 3)

Elsewhere sage Kakabhushundi says that ignorance will never envelop a bhakta (servant of Hari, Vishnu), but wisdom will enlighten him.

हरि सेवकहि न ब्याप अबिद्या ।
प्रभु प्रेरित ब्यापइ तेहि बिद्या ॥ (7: 78, 1)

In the Uttar kand of Ramcharitmanas Tulsidas illustrates the unwisdom of struggling after gyana as the sole means to liberation, through a parable told by sage Kakabhushundi to Garuda, the eagle.

"Ignorance envelops the soul and binds it to matter. As man tries to free himself from the bonds he only gets more and more entangled.

"Suppose by the grace of God, a person gets the cow of piety. She will graze on the different virtues in the field of his heart and in due time deliver the calf of love. When this calf comes to drink the milk of its mother, milk will stream into the udder and teats of the cow. The pure mind, the cowherd, extracts this milk of righteousness into the pail of faith. It is boiled and condensed by the fire of dispassion, cooled by the breeze of contentment and patience and congealed into curd by perseverance.

"When this curd is churned in the vessel of happiness, using reflections as the churning stick, self-control as the pole, truthfulness and kind speech as the ropes, the butter of detachment will rise to the surface. Collect this butter and heat it on the fire of yoga, and remove the impurities of desire and self-love, and prepare the clarified butter (ghee) of wisdom. Then fill the lamp of the mind with this ghee of wisdom. Fix the lamp firmly on the stand of serenity.

"Extract the pure cotton of transcendental self-awareness (turiya) from the other three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep (jagriti, swapna and sushupti)⁹. Make a firm wick of the three strands (gunas) of nature, with the cotton of turiya. Light this wick with the flame of knowledge

(gyana). The soul gets enlightened and self-realization begins. The mind starts loosening the bonds in the heart. When all the bonds are loosened self-realization is attained.

"But while the mind is busy untying the knots of bondage, in the light of gyana, Illusion (Maya) sends out her maidservants, the worldly riches and superhuman powers (riddhis and siddhis)¹⁰ in attractive flowing sarees. They blow out the lamp of gyana with the whiffs from the fringes of their sarees. The soul is back in the darkness of ignorance.

"If the mind is wise and pays no attention to the charms of Illusion, the light will continue to burn. Then the gods, the guardians of the senses (indriyas)¹¹ treacherously throw open the windows of the senses letting in the gusts of the wind of passions, which blow out the lamp. Who then will light this lamp again?" (See 7:116, 1 to 177, 8)

Kakabhushundi continues his teaching on bheda bhakti: "It is impossible for a weevil to carve "RAM" as it eats into the grain. It is equally impossible for a person to attain moksha by walking the path of knowledge. This path is like the sharp edge of a sword from which a person can fall off quickly and miss his final goal, which is at the very end of the path".

ग्यान पंथ कृपान कै धारा ।
 परत खोस होइ नहिं बारा ॥
 जो निर्बिघ्न पंथ निर्बहई ।
 सो कैवल्य परम पद लहई ॥ (7: 118, 1)

The path of knowledge is laborious and risky whereas the path of devotion is far easier for one going towards his final goal. Just as the heavenly cow, Kamadhenu, gives abundant milk whenever one wishes, so does Ram grant bhakti to him who asks for it. The search of knowledge then, leaving aside bhakti, is like the fool's search for the milk plant Ak, forgetting that he has a miraculous milch cow Kamadhenu at home.

जे असि भगति जानि परिहरहीं ।
 केवल ग्यान हेतु श्रम करहीं ॥

ते जड़ कामधेनु गृहं त्यागी ।
खोजत आकु फिरहिं पय लागी ॥ (7: 114, 1)

Again, devotion is like the boat in which one can cross the ocean of transmigration with ease and comfort. But any other path is like swimming this vast and turbulent ocean. (That is why the wise sages beg of the Lord for the gift of bhakti, which is the source of all happiness.)

सुनु खगेस हरि भगति बिहाई ।
जे सुख चाहहिं आन उपाई ॥
ते सठ महासिंधु बिनु तरनी ।
पैरि पार चाहहिं जड़ करनी ॥ (7: 114, 2)

The bhaktas do not want Kaivalya, absorption into Parabrahman, because then they cannot be bhaktas anymore. They want ever to be devotees of Ram, and Ram grants them this devotion.

सगुनोपासक मोच्छ न लेहीं ।
तिन्ह कहूँ राम भगति निज देहीं ॥ (6: 111, 4)

Single minded and unalloyed devotion (ananya bhakti) releases the devotee from the bonds of transmigration and unites him with the object of his love with an inseparable bond.

THE ATTITUDES (BHAVAS) OF BHAKTI

Two objects which have neither knowledge nor freedom cannot understand, accept and respond to each other. There cannot be any love between them. Love relationship is based on understanding, acceptance and mutual self-gift. Bhakti is nothing but a mutual love relationship, a relationship between the supreme Person and the finite individual person.

Indian spiritual writers, trying to express this relationship and the experience of it have made use of categories taken from poetics, namely, rasa and bhava. Bhakti itself is a rasa which springs from the innate religiosity of man, which

relates him to the Supreme Reality. This bhakti to Paramatman can take different forms or bhavas.

Traditionally Hindu scholars speak of the feeling of calm and peace in front of the Supreme Being, as Shanta bhava. Besides shanta bhava there are four other bhavas in bhakti:

Dasya Bhava	-	servant-master relationship
Sakhya bhava	-	relationship between companions
Vatsalya bhava	-	the tender relationship between parents and children.
Kanta bhava	-	relationship of intimacy and love between spouses.

These writers recognise an ascending order in the bhavas, from shanta to kanta. Each succeeding bhava contains the precedings. Thus kanta bhava contains all the others.

Tulsidas says that the basic bhava of bhakti is dasya without which no one can cross the ocean of transmigration.

सेवक सेव्य भाव बिनु भव न तरिअ उरगारि । (7: 119)

Here follows a short description of the various bhavas: Shanta bhava comes from vairagya. Vairagya meaning detachment from worldly desires on the one hand and vairagya (Visesh raga) meaning special love and attachment, on the other. Bhakti cannot exist in one who is in love with the pleasures of this world or in one who has no special love and attachment to the object of his devotion. The Lord is the only refuge and support of a bhakta.

DASYA BHAVA. Bhaktas like Bharat, Hanuman and Lakshman considered themselves as servants of Ram, ready to do whatever Ram wanted. Bhakti of Ram is often described as "Ram pad nehu", love at the feet of Ram, in other word, service. King Janak speaking of Bharat to his wife tells her that the culmination of every spiritual endeavour is the attainment of love at the holy feet of Ram. This I understand, is the mind of Bharat.

साधन सिद्धि राम पा नेह ।

मोहि लखि परत भरत मत एहू ॥ (2: 288, 4)

SAKHYA BHAVA. Ram had many life-long friends, all of them his bhaktas, like Guha, Sugriv, Vibhishan, Angad, Jambavan, etc. He called them comrades (sakhis), showered hospitality on them, and bade them a tearful farewell. Sakhya or fellowship creates an atmosphere of equality and familiarity. This is true in the case of bhakti too. A bhakta is familiar with and in a way 'equal' to the object of his love.

VATSALYA BHAVA. Kausalya and the other queens cherished Ram tenderly. The great devotee of Ram, sage Kakabhushundi was instructed by sage Lomash to meditate regularly on Ram, the child.

बालकरूप राम कर ध्याना ।

कहेउ मोहि मुनि कृपानिधाना ॥ (7: 112, 4)

As a crow Kakabhushundi would often play with Ram and enjoyed it so much that he would forget himself. And keeping the baby form of Ram in his heart he would return to his ashram.

पुनि उर राखि राम सिसुरूपा ।

निज आश्रम आवँ खगभूपा ॥ (7: 113, 7)

KANTA BHAVA. The whole Ramayan is a love story of Ram and Sita. Even though romance finds an important place in Ramcharitmanas Tulsidas does not elaborate on the spouse relationship aspect of bhakti. Many devotees and mystics of the Vaishnava tradition, however, do emphasise this aspect.

A fitting conclusion to this short discussion of the modes of bhakti relationship may be a summary of the answer of sage Valmiki to Ram to his query as to which would be a right place for him, Sita and Lakshman to stay in the forest. Valmiki says: "A bhakta's mind is purified of all passions. He is unselfish. He rejoices at the prosperity of others and grieves at their adversity. He and his family worships at the holiest of all places of pilgrimage, the lotus feet of Ram. A true devotee does not wish for any other favour from his

Lord than to be granted unalloyed devotion. He is not eager even to attain moksha.

"A bhakta is not proud of his caste, family, riches or power. Ram is everything for him. His trust in Ram is so complete that Ram is his only support. The devotee is like the mythical bird chataka, which despises all the water reservoirs around and waits patiently for the rain clouds to quench its thirst with a few rain drops. Ram's name is always on a bhakta's lips, and awake or asleep, the longing for Ram is ever in his heart.

"Rivers continually empty themselves into the ocean. Still the ocean is not filled. Similarly the ocean of the bhakta's heart is always hungry and is yearning for more and more of the nectar of Ram's story. Beautiful swans immersed in bliss, sport in lake Mansarovar picking up pearls and gems. So also a bhakta, in ecstasy of joy, listens to the story of Ram and picks up from it, invaluable pearls of Ram's virtues.

"Oh Ram! you will find a happy home in the hearts of such devotees". After this dialogue, Valmiki directed Ram to the forest of Panchwati, on the banks of the Godavari.

We have attempted a very elementary analysis of the emotional dimension in bhakti. In the lives and works of the devotees and saints of different religions, like Mirabai, Teresa of Avila, the sufi saints, Bernard of Clairvaux, Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and others we see this intimate love relationship between the devotee and his/her beloved. Be it conceded that there are many divergent and even contrary trends in the devotional practices, conditioned as they are by the mythical and historical content of the devotees' faith, their culture and their milieux. A deep undercurrent carries the soul towards the Absolute, Parabrahman; the Spirit of God inspiring, nurturing and guiding the inexpressible longings of the human heart of the bhaktas of different religious persuasions.

BHAKTI AND THE COMMON GOOD (Lokmangal, Parhit)

The common good, the well being of the world, depends on the concern of one person for another. When one looks for the good of others in thought word and deed (parhit nirat) he is the universal friend, What is the relation between

bhakti and the common good? Does a bhakta retire into his own world and busy himself with ascetic and other practices to attain his ultimate goal, unmindful of what is happening outside? Is a bhakta aware of and concerned with the good of his fellow-beings? Again, is the concern for the common good just a virtue added to bhakti or is it of the very nature of bhakti? The present paragraph tries to see how Tulsidas answers these questions.

Bharat was on his way to Chitrakoot to meet Ram and persuade him to come back to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. The gods were frightened that Bharat would take away Ram from the forest and thus bring their hope of liberation from the oppression of the rakshasas to nought. At that moment Brihaspati their guru put them at rest saying: "The devotees of Ram are always intent on doing good to others. They are compassionate towards those who suffer. Bharat is the greatest of the bhaktas. Oh Indra! do not be afraid of him".

राम भात परहित निरत पर दुख दुखी दयाल ।

भात सिरोमनि भरत तेँ जनि डरपहुँ सुरपाल ॥ (2: 219)

Tulsidas says that a bhakta sees the whole universe, animate and inanimate suffused with Ram (Parabrahman).

जड़ चेतन जग जीव जत सकल राममय जानि । (1: 7, Line 5)

All beings are expressions of the same Parabrahman. Therefore a bhakta experiences his deep solidarity with all beings in the universe. All creatures are objects of his love and devotion. Shiva says to Parvati: "He Parvati! to whom can a bhakta of Ram do any harm, detached as he is from all lust, pride and anger, viewing as he does the whole universe suffused by his own Lord, whom can he hate.

उमा जे राम चरन रत बिगत काम मद क्रोध ।

निज प्रभुमय देखिँ जगत् केहि सन करहिँ बिरोध ॥ (7: 112)

Ram himself is the model of disinterested service. He was the Maryada Purushottam. He had always the good of others uppermost in his mind. His first duty as a kshatriya was the protection of the weak. We saw him fighting the

rakshasas who were harassing the munis when he was only a lad. Once, wandering through the forest, he came upon a heap of bones. Told that they were the bones of ascetics eaten by the rakshasas tears of compassion filled his eyes. With raised hands he swore that he would rid this earth of the wicked rakshasas. He went around the nearby ashrams to give the ascetics the assurance of his protection. Like Ram his bhaktas too have compassion for their fellow beings. They look for the happiness and well being of others. One of the great devotees of Ram says: "I do not want heaven, nor kingdom nor better birth, I want only to liberate the suffering beings of their sorrow".

स्वर्गं नाभिवान्छामि न राज्यं न पुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ॥

(quote from Tulsi ki Sadhana by Acharya Viswanath Prasad Mishra, page 99. 1978 ed.)

It is in the very nature of the saints (bhaktas) to be of an open mind, to love others and dedicate themselves to the world's welfare.

संत सरल चित जगत हित जानि सुभाउ सनेहु । (1: 3)

What is the reason for this spontaneous understanding and sympathy of the saints? Surely their solidarity with the universe which they see suffused by Parabrahman. Besides, the saints too had their share of suffering. In some of his other poems Tulsidas describes his helplessness as an orphan boy and the poverty and oppression he faced in life. Still, he kept no ill feelings towards the rich and the powerful, the wicked and the malevolent who persecuted him.

In his introduction to Ramcharitmanas Tulsidas declares that his work is meant to benefit all people, the evil as well as the good, the learned as well as the unlearned. He wrote it in the popular language which was not appreciated by scholars, so that also the common people could be benefited. He believed that fame, poetry and wealth were good only when they brought happiness to others. The Ganges is good only because it is beneficial to all.

कीरति भनिति भूति भलि सोई ।

सुरसरि सम सब कहँ हित होई ॥ (1: 13, 5)

Tulsidas is not satisfied with the usual comparison poets make, of the heart of a bhakta with butter (kindness and compassion of the saint). He says: They poets have said that the heart of a saint is like butter, but it is not the right comparison. Because butter melts when it itself is heated, but the holy saints melt at the heat of suffering in others.

सन्त हृदय नवनीत समाना ।

कहा कबिन्ह परि कहै न जाना ॥

निज परिताप द्रवइ नवनीता

पर दुख द्रवहिं संत सुपुनीता ॥ (7: 124, 4)

Tulsidas uses the analogy of cotton to explain the readiness of sadhus (For Tulsidas the words, sadhu, sant and bhakta are interchangeable.) The pulp of a cotton fruit is pure, shining and dry. Similarly the heart of a saint is pure and bright (with the light of spiritual wisdom). It is devoid of the moisture (of passions and desires). The story of a saint is similar to the story of cotton. (The pulp is extracted from the fruit, beaten loose, spun into thread and woven into cloth.) It undergoes great suffering in order to cover the nakedness of others. Therefore it is an object of worship and praise in this world. (So too the saints.)

साधु चरित सुभ चरित कपासू ।

निरस बिसद गुनमय फल जासू ॥

जो साह दुख परिछिद्र दुरावा ।

बंदनीय जेहिं जग जस पावा ॥ (1: 1, 3)

Tulsidas says that it is in the nature of the saints to devote themselves wholeheartedly in thought word and deed for the good of their fellow-beings. They will embrace suffering for the well being of others while the wicked will undergo suffering to bring harm on others.

पर उपकार बचन मन काया ।

सत सहज सुभाउ खगाराया ॥

संत सहहिं दुख पर हित लागी ।

पर दुख हेतु असंत अभागी ॥ (7: 120, 7, 8)

The scriptures declare that kindness to fellow-being (ahimsa) is the supreme dharma while insulting others is the most heinous sin.

परम धर्म श्रुति विदित अहिंसा ।

पर निंदा सम अघ न गरीसा ॥ (7: 120, 11)

Narad once came to meet Ram in the forest. During their conversation he asked Ram what the distinguishing marks of the saints are. Among other things Ram told him that a true bhakta is a person who is habitually active in selfless service.

हेतु रहित परहित रत सीला । (3: 45, 4)

The story of the god of love, Kamdev, illustrates the greatness of selfless service. Once Shiva, renouncing his wife, Sati, entered into the stage of deep contemplation (samadhi). But in the meanwhile the gods were being harassed by the demons. The god Brahma told them that they could be saved from the demons, only by a son of Shiva. Hence Shiva had to be aroused from his samadhi and made to marry Parvati, the daughter of Himavant. The gods, then, decided to send Kamdev to rouse Shiva from his samadhi and fire him with sexual passion. Kamadev knew only too well that to do the bidding of the gods would cost him his life. Still, he decided to go ahead and meet his fate. Because he knew from the scriptures that the supreme righteousness was to do good to others. "He who sacrifices his life for the benefit of others is praised by the saints for all ages to come."

पर हित लागि तजइ जो देही ।

संतत संत प्रसंसहिं तेही ॥ (1: 83, 1)

The eagle Jatayu, a great bhakta of Ram, fought valiantly with Ravan to rescue Sita. Old and weak, he was mortally wounded. When Ram found Jatayu, he was already dying. Caressing him affectionately Ram told him: "There is nothing impossible in this world for a person who has the good of others at heart".

Tulsidas describes the greatness of the bhaktas through

several similes. They are like mountains which bear the tiny grass on their heads (peaks). They are similar to the deep ocean with the foam floating on its surface. As the earth carries the worthless sand and dust on its vast expanse, noble persons love, cherish and sustain the weak and the puny.

बड़े सनेह लघुन्ह पर करहीं ।
गिरि निज सिरनिसदा तृन धरहीं ॥
जलधि अगाध मौलि बह फेनु ।
संतत धरनि धरत सिर रेनु ॥ (1: 166, 4)

Abhakta readily forgives the wrong done to him. Not merely that; he returns good for evil. Vibhishan was kicked by his brother Ravan in the council hall. But he took no offence at the illtreatment he received. On the contrary he fell at the wicked Ravan's feet and begged him to make peace with Ram before it was too late.

The difference between a saint and a wicked man is like the difference in the conduct of the axe and the sandalwood tree. When the axe cuts the sandalwood, it exudes its fragrance to the axe.

काटइ परसु मलय सुनु भाई ।
निज गुन देइ सुगंध बसाई ॥ (7: 36, 4)

Tulsidas compares a person who is generous towards others to a tree laden with sweet fruits. The saints too are generous souls. He says of the trees in the forest where Ram and Lakshman were roaming. They were so laden with fruits that the branches nearly touched the ground. When good men are blessed with wealth, their hearts bend down to the needs of the poor, just as the trees bend their branches within easy reach of the weary traveller.

फल भारननमि बिट्प सब रहे भूमि निअराइ ।
पर उपकारी पुरुष जिमि नबहिं सुसंपति पाइ ॥ (3: 40)

Shiva tells Parvati of the right use of wealth. He says: "That wealth is blessed which is the first to go out (to the poor and needy).

सो धन धन्य प्रथम गति जाकी । (7: 126, 4)

Tulsidas looks forward to the reign of Ram, Ramrajya, when all will be generous and good to one another. All will be bhaktas of Ram and selfless in the service of others. This selflessness is the acid test of genuine bhakti. The reason why he despises the bhakti of the gods is that the gods are hardened selfseekers. Eventhough they live in high places (the world of the gods) their deeds are mean. They are jealous and cannot countenance the prosperity of others.

ऊँच निवासु नीचि करतूती ।
देखि न सकहिं पराइ बिभूति ॥ (2: 11, 3)

Once, in the general assembly of the citizens, Ram was instructing the people on bhakti. They listened to him with rapt attention. At the end, all exclaimed with one voice: "There are only two selfless benefactors in this world, you and your devotee, oh Destroyer of the demons! All others are self interested and no one has others' interest at heart oh Lord, no, not even in dream!"

हेतु रहित जग जुग उपकारी ।
तुम्ह तुम्हार सेवक असुरारी ॥
स्वारथ मीत सकल जग माहीं ।
सपनेहुँ प्रभु परमारथ नाहीं ॥ (7: 46, 3)

The appearance of the saints on this earth always gladdens the world just as the rising of the sun and the moon shed light on the earth.

संत उदय संतत सुखकारी ।
बिस्व सुखद जिमि इंदु तमारी ॥ (7: 120, 11)

It is worth noting at this point that Tulsidas is not alone in understanding the close relationship between bhakti and parhit. The main reason for this may be that bhaktas are able to meet God, the invisible all pervading reality, Par-abrahman, in their fellow beings. The wise sages of the Upanishads (the ancient Indian thinkers) have said: "Sarvam khalvidam Brahman" (the Absolute pervades the whole universe). Saints and poets like Kabir and Tagore teach that Paramatman is to be searched for and found in

one's fellow-beings, especially the suffering ones, rather than in temples and idols. In them he is better served than in the places of pilgrimage. Mother Teresa of Calcutta finds Jesus in the poorest of the poor and in the most miserable and forlorn. By her own testimony she draws the strength to sacrifice her life with them and for them from her deep attachment and devotion to Jesus. She spends a considerable part of her overbusy time in communing with Christ. His disciple John tells us: "And indeed this command comes to us from Christ himself: that he who loves God must also love his brother." The bhaktas of every religion will spontaneously love his fellow-beings irrespective of caste or creed, rank or riches. The deeper his love for God, the stronger his preparedness to serve them.

Section Two:

A. THE MEANS TO ATTAIN BHAKTI

LOVING ATTENTION AND CONFIDENT FAITH (SHRADDHA AND VISWAS)

Religious experience is essentially the experience of the Absolute Reality, Parabrahman. Bhakti can be qualified as religious experience. A person immersed in worldly desires and comforts can hardly become aware of God's presence within him and around him. God experience is basically a constant awareness of his presence. Loving attention to this presence deepens this awareness. It arouses love and devotion in one's heart. The heart surrenders itself in trust and faith, to this mysterious presence, Parabrahman.

According to Tulsidas, Parvati the consort of Shiva is the embodiment of this loving attention to Ram the avatar (descent) of Parabrahman himself. Shiva is the embodiment of confident faith. While paying homage to Shiva and Parvati, Tulsidas emphasises the need of shraddha and viswas in order to experience the indwelling Paramatman, without these even those who have reached the summit of ascetic and yogic endeavour are unable to experience (see) the Paramatman indwelling their hearts.

भवानीशंकरौ वन्दे श्रद्धाविश्वसरूपिणौ ।

याभ्यां बिना न पश्यन्ति सिद्धाः स्वान्तः स्थमीश्वरम्

(1 : sanskrit verse 2)

DEVOTION TO SHIVA

Once the great sage Yagnavalkya was narrating the story of Ram to sage Bhardwaj. Bhardwaj was so moved on hearing the exploits of Shiva and Shiva's devotion to Ram, that Yagnavalkya was very pleased and congratulated him on his bhakti to Shiva. Shiva merits devotion because he is the greatest devotee of Ram. He even deserted his dear wife Sati because of her offensive behaviour towards Ram in testing whether he was really the avatar of Parabrahman. Ram is never pleased with any one who is not a devotee of Shiva. Sincere devotion to Shiva is the distinguishing mark of a bhakta of Ram.

सिव पद कमल जिन्हहि रति नाहीं ।

रामहि ते सपनेहुँ न सोहाहीं ॥

बिनु छल बिस्वनाथ पद नेहू ।

राम भात कर लच्छन एहू ॥ (1 : 103, 3)

In the introduction to this book we referred to the story of Narad and god Vishnu. According to that story Vishnu had put Narad under the power of illusion and Narad in turn put a curse on Vishnu. But when Narad's illusion was removed, he felt sorry for having cursed Vishnu and asked for fitting penance. Then Vishnu told Narad to recite the hundred names of Shiva as penance, adding: "He who has not found favour with Shiva cannot be my bhakta".

जेहि पर कृपा न करहिं पुरारी ।

सो न पाव मुनि भगति हमारी ॥ (1: 137, 4)

Before crossing over to Lanka with his army Ram constructed a temple for Shiva at the bridgehead, called all the ascetics around and worshipped Shiva. He told them: "An offender of Shiva may appear to be my devotee, but he can never reach me".

सिव द्रोहि मम भात कहावा ।

सो नर सपनेहुँ मोहि न पावा ॥ (2: 1, 4)

In the time of Tulsidas already, there were the two main streams of bhakti, Vaishnavism and Shaivism, practised by those devoted to Vishnu and Shiva respectively. Being a bhakta of Ram Tulsidas was a Vaishnavite, but he probably wanted to reconcile the two rival factions. That might have been the reason why he insisted on devotion to Shiva as a necessary condition for devotion to Ram (Vishnu).

RAM THE LORD OF MAYA

The word 'Maya' has two meanings. Maya can mean the mysterious creative power of Parabrahman. It can also mean the veil of ignorance enveloping the Individual Self and preventing him from knowing the Universal Self. Here we use the word Maya for the veil of ignorance. A person should not surrender himself to Maya. He must recognize Ram as the lord of Maya. He, only he can allow Maya to spread its veil of ignorance on a person or free him from the power of Maya. Once we acknowledge this truth, we become enlightened and free. Seeing all the worldly goods and physical and even spiritual attainments as the effect of Maya, one takes refuge in Ram the Lord of Maya and becomes a bhakta.

The Lord of Maya is like a juggler who practises very clever tricks. But his tricks are no secrets to his servant, the bhakta.

नट कृत बिकट कपट खगराया ।

नट सेवकहि न ब्यापइ माया ॥ (7: 103, 4)

So Illusion cannot overcome a devotee. He remains an enlightened soul.

THE GRACE OF RAM

Tulsidas says that even though the gem of bhakti is to be seen here and there in the world, without Ram's grace no one can obtain it.

सो मनि जदपि प्राट जग अहई ।

राम कृपा बिनु नहिं कोउ लहई ॥ (7: 119, 6)

The scriptures declare that the goal of all spiritual endeavour is devotion to Vishnu. People practise self-control,

fasting and penance, they keep religious observances like vows, almsgiving, sacrifices and prayers; they strive to acquire virtues like compassion, spirit of service to brahmins and gurus, knowledge, discretion, modesty and noble character. The scriptures proclaim that the goal of all these is devotion to Ram. Still only some rare souls attain bhakti, and that too by the grace of Ram.

नाना कर्म धर्म व्रत दाना ।
 संजम दम जप तप मख नाना ॥
 भूत दया द्विज गुर सेवकाई ।
 बिद्या बिनय बिबेक बड़ाई ॥
 जहँ लागि साधन बेद बखानी ।
 सब कर फल हरि भगति भवानी ॥
 सो रघुनाथ भगति श्रुति गाई ।
 राम कृपाँ काहूँ एक पाई ॥ (7: 125, 3, 4)

Tulsidas has no other longing in his heart than to obtain unalloyed devotion (ananya bhakti) to Ram. He prays for this gift to Ram himself, the indwelling Spirit of the whole universe, with trust and love.

नान्या स्पृहा रघुपते हृदयेऽस्मदीये
 सत्यं वदामि च भवानखिलान्तरात्मा ।
 भक्तिं प्रयच्छ रघुपुंगव निर्भरां मे । (5, sloka 2)

LOVE FOR RAM

One may practise yoga and asceticism. One may be a detached person'full of spiritual wisdom. But without love he will never find Ram.

मिलहिं न रघुपति बिनु अनुरागा ।
 किँएँ जोग तप ग्यान बिरागा ॥ (7: 61, 1)

"Love can draw out the grace of Ram, much more easily than yoga, prayer, almsgiving, sacrifices or vows". Says Shiva to Parvati:

उमा जोग जप दान तप नाना मख व्रत नेम ।
 'राम कृपा नहिं करहिं तसि जसि निष्केवल प्रेम ॥ (6: 117)†

REPENTANCE AND TRUST

Ram is prepared to receive even the greatest of sinners into his protection and make him his bhakta provided he is repentant. The repentant Vibhishan came to Ram and became one of his greatest bhaktas. Explaining his attitude towards Vibhishan, to Sugriv and his monkeys Ram says: "Even if one is a murderer of a million brahmins, I will not reject him if only he comes to my protection. No sooner than one comes to my presence than the accumulated sins of all his previous lives are destroyed".

कोटि बिप्र बध लागहिं जाहू ।
आएँ सरन तजउँ नहिं ताहू ॥
सनमुख होइ जीव मोहि जबहीं ।
जन्म कोटि अघ नासहिं तबहीं ॥ (5: 43, 1)

Because Vibhishan had come to Ram despising his family, friends and possessions and accepted Ram as his only support, Ram too assures him a place right within his heart. It was for such that Ram assumed the human form. He says: "Good people (like you) reside in my heart as riches in a miser's heart".

अस सज्जन मम उर बस कैसें ।
लोभी हृदयें बसइ धनु, जैसें ॥ (5: 47, 4)

Ram grants devotion even to the crook, the criminal, the evil-minded, the sinner, the mean, the impudent, the ungodly and the unscrupulous, if only they come and prostrate before him with a sincere heart. He receives them as his own.

क्रूर कुटिल खल कुमति कलंकी ।
नीच निसील निरीस निसंकी ॥
तेउ सुनि सरन सामुहें आए ।
सकृत् प्रनामू किहें अपनाए ॥ (2: 298, 2)

The surest way then, to attain bhakti is to go to Ram and prostrate before him like Vibhishan saying: "Save me Lord, save me, You free from sorrow and gladden the hearts of those who come to you for protection".

त्राहि त्राहि आरति हरन सरन सुखद रघुवीर । (5: 45)

ASSOCIATION WITH THE SAINTS (SATSANG) and LISTENING TO THE STORY OF RAM

The easiest way to attain Rambhakti is to associate with the saints who regularly narrate the story of Ram. By listening to Ramkatha (story of Ram) love of Ram is engendered in the heart. Tulsidas says: "Without association with the saints, there can be no Ramkatha. Unless one listens to Ramkatha desires will not flee from one's heart. Unless desires flee, the heart cannot attach itself with firm love to Ram".

बिनु सतसंग न हरि कथा तेहि बिनु मोह न भाग ।
मोह गएँ बिनु राम पद होइ न दृढ़ अनुराग ॥ (7: 61)

Ramkatha is like the pure lake Manasarovar. It purifies those who bathe in it and refreshes those who drink from it. They become free from passions. They are enlightened with wisdom and understanding. Those who have not washed their minds in this purifying water are miserable beings duped by the vile tricks of Kaliyuga. They are like the thirsty deer running after the glittering and receding mirage in search of water, only to be overcome with fatigue and disappointment. (Unwise people run after the transitory pleasures of the world in search of happiness. But happiness always recedes from them. These people get exhausted and die in the vast desert of life without ever having found fulfilment or happiness).

जिन्ह एहिं बारि न मानस धोए ।
ते कायर कलि काल बिगोए ॥
तृषित निरखि रबि कर भव बारी ।
फिरिहहिं मृग जिमि जीव दुखारी ॥ (1: 44: 4)

Only those to whom association of the saints is very dear, are entitled to hear Ramkatha.

राम कथा के तेई अधिकारी ।
जिन्ह केँ सत संगति अति प्यारी ॥ (7: 127, 3)

One who listens regularly to Ramkatha with faith will easily attain Rambhakti which is rarely attained even by ascetics.

मुनि दुर्लभ हरि भगति नर पावहिं बिनहिं प्रयास ।
जे यह कथा निरंतर सुनहिं मानि बिस्वास ॥ (7: 126)

So the advice of Tulsidas is "Listen to the holy story (Story of Ram), listening to this, you will be freed from all illusion, Trust in Ram will be kindled in your heart and you will cross the ocean of sansara without any difficulty".

सुनहु परम पुनीत इतिहासा ।
जो सुनि सकल लोक भ्रम नासा ॥
उपजइ राम चरन बिस्वासा ।
भव निधि तर नर बिनहिं प्रयासा ॥ (7: 54, 5)

PATH OF DEVOTION (BHAKTIMARGA), A COMMON PATH (RAJPATH)

It is true that serenity (sam), self-discipline (dam), asceticism (yam) and religious observances (niyam) are necessary for bhakti. But once a person has received the grace of devotion, all this becomes easy. Addressing the assembly of the citizens of Ayodhya Ram says: "The scriptures say that the path of my bhakti is easily accessible and pleasant. What is the difficulty in the way of devotion? No burdensome practice of yoga, sacrifices, prayer, asceticism or fasting. What is required is a guileless mind, a sincere character and a contented heart free from greed".

सुलभ सुखद मारग यह भाई ।
भगति मोरि पुरान श्रुति गाई ॥
कहहु भगति पथ कवन प्रयासा ।
जोग न मख जप तप उपबासा ॥
सरल सुभाव न मन कुटिलाई ।
जथा लाभ संतोष सदाई ॥ (7: 44, 1 और 45, 1)

This common road is meant for the sannyasi and the householder, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the powerful and the weak.

In the same discourse Ram tells them of the unique opportunity offered to human beings to reach their final goal. "It is by great good fortune that one receives a human

birth, rarely granted even to the gods, say the scriptures. The human state is the stage for spiritual endeavour and the gateway to final liberation”.

बड़े भाग मानुष तनु पावा ।

सुर दुर्लभ सब ग्रन्थि गावा ॥

साधन धाम मोछ कर द्वारा ।

पाइ न जोहि परलोक सँवारा ॥ (7: 42, 4)

B. FRUITS OF BHAKTI

BHAKTI, THE FRUIT OF ALL SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOUR

Bhaktas consider bhakti itself as the ultimate goal or fruit of all spiritual endeavour, their life itself. The only ‘fruit’ they expect is the continuous purification and growth in bhakti until it flowers into unalloyed devotion and union with Paramatman, ananya bhakti. However, here we speak of the effects of bhakti on the person of the devotee as long as he is in the stage of growth.

Vasishtha was one of the great sages of his time. He did not wish to serve as a family mentor (Kulguru) of any king, or royal line, however great and famous. He considered it below his dignity. However he knew that the fruit of all spiritual practices is bhakti to Ram. His presence and office of kulguru in Dasrath’s palace would give him a golden opportunity to become a great devotee of Ram, he saw. This was the only reason why Vasishtha accepted that humble office of kulguru. This secret he divulged to Ram when he paid him a visit while he was ruling Ayodhya. Many a sage also gave up the path of knowledge and embraced the path of bhakti, which is more desirable than all the superhuman attainments.

BHAKTI PURIFIES THE HEART

Vasishtha says that one cannot wash away one’s sins by practices which are tainted by human sinfulness. Bhakti alone is like the clean water that washes away all the dirt that is accumulated in the interior of man. “Will dirt go by washing with dirt? Will one get butter by churning water?

The dirt of the soul will not go unless washed by the water of love and devotion to Ram".

छूटइ मल कि मखहि के धौँ ।
घृत कि पाव कोइ बारि बिलौँ ॥
प्रेम भगति जल बिनु रघुराई ।
अभिअंतर मल कबहुँ न जाई ॥ (7: 48, 3)

Many wicked enemies like greed, lust, jealousy, arrogance and pride continue to reside in the heart until Ram armed with his bow and arrows makes his home there.

तब लागि हृदयँ बसत खल नाना ।
लोभ मोह मच्छर मद माना ॥
जब लागि उर न बसत रघुनाथा ।
धरें चाप सायक कटि भाथा ॥ (5: 46, 1)

BHAKTI ENLIGHTENS THE SOUL

Sage Kakabhushundi was liberated from the darkness of illusion by bhakti. Bhakti is like the fire which inhabits the mind and burns away all the evil passions and desires which bind a person to the cycle of rebirth. It is like the pearl shedding light in the soul. Even if one were to bring down the moon and set fire to all the mountains, the night's darkness will not give way without the sun. Similarly the darkness of ignorance, sin and suffering is conquered only by bhakti. A bhakta has the pearl of devotion always shining in his soul.

BHAKTI IS ENNOBLING AND POWERFUL

People with detestable habits and persons of low rank and little wisdom become purified and holy, and worthy of praise, by uttering Ram's name. Guha the king of the Nishads came with Bharat to meet Ram. On seeing him the venerable sage Vasishtha stood up and embraced him because Guha was a bhakta of Ram.

Ram himself assured the humble sannyasini Sabri that he was not bothered about caste or rank, wisdom or sex, his only relationship was love. Ram treated all his bhaktas as his friends and equals. Commenting on Ram's attitude to

the forest tribes, Tulsidas comments: "Love alone is what Ram wants. Let the wise understand this".

रामहि केवल प्रेमु पिआरा ।

जानि लेउ जो जाननिहारा ॥ (3: 136, 1)

Garuda asks sage Kakabhushundi: Why is it that the terrible Yama has no power over you, oh, the gracious one? Is it because you are a great yogi or a person of deep spiritual wisdom (gyan)? No, neither. It was the immense power of bhakti.

तुम्हहि न ब्यापत काल अति कराल कारन कवन ।

मोहि सो कहहु कृपाल ग्यान प्रभाव कि जोग बल ॥ (7: 94)

BHAKTI GIVES MEANING TO LIFE

Bhakti is the salt of life. Salt gives taste to the food. Bhakti gives real joy and meaning to life. It points towards a goal worth all troubles and struggles. Kakabhushundi was offered a boon by Ram himself, of mystic powers, fabulous wealth or moksha itself. But he reflected and saw that all these were worthless without bhakti. "All the virtues and pleasures of life are like a rich variety of food without salt (and so without taste). For a man without devotion to God, what is the use of happiness? So I asked for ananya bhakti, oh king of the birds (Garuda)".

भगति हीन गुन सब सुख ऐसे ।

लवन बिना बहु बिंजन जैसे ॥

भजन हीन सुख कवने काजा ।

अस बिचारि बोलेउँ खगराजा ॥ (7: 83, 3)

"The real fulfilment of life of every living being is love at Ram's feet (devotion to Ram) in thought, word and deed". Says the same Kakabhushundi.

स्वारथ साँच जीव कहूँ एहा ।

मन करम बचन राम पद नेहा ॥ (7: 95, 1)

BHAKTA DEAR TO GOD

While giving the boon of ananya bhakti to Kakabhushundi Ram tells him: "All creatures exist through my mysterious power of creation. I love all of them. But I love human beings more than the others. From among them I have a special love for those who know and follow the injunctions of the scriptures. Still more do I love wise and detached men. But most of all I love my own devotees. Even Brahma is dear to me, only because he is my bhakta. My devotee may be the lowliest of all creatures, but he is most dear to my heart".

Ram feels happy and at home with his devotees. Tulsidas compares Ram with the swimming and sporting swan in the 'Mansarovar' of his bhakta's heart. Again the bhaktas themselves are like swans and Ram, the Mansarovar. Immersed in bliss they swim about contemplating the attributes of Ram.

BHAKTAS POWERFUL WITH GOD

Bhakti as we have seen is a love relationship. Love is the most powerful thing that can ever exist. The romantic expression, "Love is strong as death" gives a rather fair idea of the power of love. Bhakti which unites the bhakta to God, the very source of all power makes him share in the divine power. As a bhakta surrenders himself to God, God himself surrenders in love to his bhakta. It is surrender in love and not fear, in freedom and not in bondage. It is a mutual surrender as between spouses.

It is easy enough to understand that man surrenders to God. But it is difficult to understand God's self-surrender to man. We call death "the Leveller" but we can also call love "the Leveller". If we reflect on the bhavas of bhakti, especially sakhyabhava and kantabhava we can get a faint idea of the levelling effect of bhakti. This 'levelling' being a mystical experience cannot be explained in words. But with the help of this idea we can understand how the guru of the gods, Brihaspati can tell the gods: "Bharat is the greatest lover of Ram. All the world worships Ram and Ram worships Bharat".

भरत सरिस को राम सनेही ।

जगु जप राम रामु जप जेही ॥ (2: 217, 4)

Tulsidas says that Ram comes under the spell of his bhaktas. He illustrates this again, with the story of Bharat. Towards the end of the consultations in Chitrakoot between Ram, Bharat and the people, the gods who were watching the whole proceeding, got panicky and began whispering to one another: "Ram has come under the spell of his bhakta (Bharat)". They were really afraid that Ram would give into the wishes of Bharat.

रघुपति भगत भगति बस अहहीं । (2: 264, 2)

In Kakabhushundi's opinion, "Oh Lord (Garuda), I believe that a devotee of Ram is greater than Ram himself".

मोरें मन प्रभु अस बिस्वासा ।

राम ते अधिक राम कर दासा ॥ (7: 119, 8)

Hanuman enjoys superhuman power, because he remembers Ram's name. This remembrance brings Ram, the very seat of power on his side.

सुमिरि पवनसुत पावन नामू ।

अपने बस करि राखे रामू ॥ (1: 25, 3)

Ram is the ocean, his wise devotees are the clouds, he the sandalwood tree, they the breeze that diffuses his fragrance.

BHAKTI, SOURCE OF ALL BLESSINGS

When sage Vasishtha embraced the Nishad king Guha, the gods sang: "Devotion to Ram is the source of all choice blessings" and showered flowers from heaven.

रघुपति भगति सुमंगल मूला ।

नभ सराहि सुर बरिसहि फूला ॥ (2: 242, 4)

One cannot hope for peace and happiness unless one is detached from all desires which are the sources of sorrow, and becomes a worshipper of Ram.

तब लगी कुसल न जीव कहूँ सपनेहुँ मन बिश्राम ।

जब लगी भजन न राम कहूँ सोक धाम तजि काम ॥ (5: 46)

WOE TO HIM WHO IS NOT DEVOTED TO RAM

Refusal to worship Ram and to be devoted to him, will bring misery and unhappiness. Mandodari, Ravan's loving wife had warned her husband over and over again that his refusal to worship Ram and be his devotee would bring him sorrow and disaster. But Ravan did not listen to her. The result was that all his kith and kin were destroyed and he himself finally fell in battle. Mandodari sitting in front of the dismembered head and hands of Ravan, recounted his heroic deeds and prowess, and lamented over him saying: "Alas, you oh hater of Ram! how pitiful is your condition! There is no one of your race left, even to lament over you!"

राम बिमुख अस हाल तुम्हारा ।

रहा न कोउ कुल रोवनिहारा ॥ (6: 103, 5)

He who is not devoted to Ram can find no refuge in all the three worlds. The whole creation becomes his enemy. Once Jayant, son of god Indra took the form of a crow and pecked at Sita's foot until it bled, and flew away. Seeing this Ram shot an arrow at him. The arrow followed him wherever he fled. He first went to the world of the gods, then to that of Brahma, and even to the abode of the kind Shiva. But none of them would give him shelter. Finally Narad, seeing his pitiable condition advised him to go back to Ram and beg for forgiveness.¹² Tulsidas says that everything in creation will be against a person averse to Ram. "His mother will be like death, his father, the very god of death, Yama. The life giving nectar will act on him like poison. His friend will behave like a hundred enemies, trying to do him harm, and the good Ganges, the river of the gods, will be like Vaitarani".¹³

मातु मृत्यु पितु समन समाना ।
 सुधा होइ बिष सुनु हरिजाना ॥
 मित्र करइ सत रिपु कै करनी ।
 त्त कहँ बिबुधनदी बतरनी ॥ (3: 1, 3, 4)

We shall conclude this paragraph, "Fruits of Bhakti" by quoting the words of Shiva to Parvati in which Tulsidas describes a bhakta. He says in fact, that bhakti is the perfection of knowledge and action, of gyana and karma and the flowering of all human virtues. A genuine bhakta is a fulfilled person.

"A loving devotee at the feet of Ram is a person of unsurpassed wisdom and accomplishment. He is a priceless jewel in this world. He is learned and munificent. He is a man of dharma and protector of his race. He is perfect in right conduct and wise in judgement. He has correctly understood the meaning of the scriptures. He is a seer, he is a sage, he is the hero of the battle (of life). Because he is one who worships Ram without guile.

सोइ सर्वग्य गुनी सोइ ग्याता ।
 सोइ महि मडित पडित दाता ॥
 धर्म परायन सोइ कुल त्राता ।
 राम चरन जाकर मन राता ॥
 नीति निपुन सोइ परम सयाना ।
 श्रुति सिद्धान्त नीक तेहिं जाना ॥
 सोइ कबि कोबिद सोइ रनधीरा ।
 जो छल छाड़ि भजइ रघुवीरा ॥ (7: 126, 1, 2)

C. BHAKTI AND GOD EXPERIENCE

It is interesting to note that in all religions devotion and God experience go together. God experience is something beyond reason, which is not the same as unreasonable. Reasoning power distinguishes man from animals. Besides this, man has some other mental and spiritual qualities which makes him far superior to animals. We speak of man as composite of body, mind and spirit, which makes it

easier to call God experience as a spiritual experience, even though it is the experience of the whole human being. Tulsidas praises the human birth as a golden opportunity for spiritual endeavour and attainment of liberation.

With the dawn of the 'age of enlightenment' in the west, the tendency to consider reason as the sole guide of man, and as the tool of solution to all human problems, started growing. One of the greatest of the modern thinkers, Blaise Pascal reacted to this strongly when he said: "The heart has reasons which the reason doesn't know". In spite of the many benefits this rationalistic culture and education of the west has brought to mankind, one of the greatest disservices it has done is to rob man of his deeper personality and to fence him in within his senses and reason. In the name of science or economics, politics or psychology, people try to put the deeper realities of life out of bounds for man. The position of rationalism is to deny God experience or explain it away. But it is faith which is beyond reason that is the ground of God experience. We can compare reason to a horse which comes up against an untrodden terrain. It stops, listens with tensed ears, looks around with sharp eyes, smells with widened nostrils, finds everything so unfamiliar and strange, turns back and trots away on the already trodden path, unless prodded on by the rider to go forward.

The sages however go beyond the limits of reason and proclaim that knowledge of the Absolute Reality (Brahma-vidya) is possible and real, even though attainable only by way of negation. All rational concepts fail to define Brahman. All analogical attributions to Parabrahman have to be denied by saying: "Neti, neti" (not this, not this.) This suprarational knowledge, this intuition, this encounter with the Universal Self is God experience. Man's helplessness in front of this ineffable mystery is expressed by the great mystics of different religions in different ways, as 'the Dark Night of the Soul' or 'Soonya' (absence of being as we know it) or some other way. Tulsidas makes sage Lomash, the great expounder of abheda bhakti speak of Parabrahman as the Lord of the heart (hrudayesha), attainable by

experience (anubhavagamyā) and compares the Universal Self and the Individual Self to water and ripples respectively. However God experience, just as God himself, cannot be defined in rational and phenomenological terms.

A bhakta is a very reasonable and a well integrated person. His body, reason, emotions, intuitive power, his spirit, all are alive and vibrant. And it is the whole person and not any particular part of him that experiences God.

A bhakta commits himself in faith and trust, to God, like a child in the hands of its mother. This self-surrender gives him a deep sense of peace, even when he is suffering and is surrounded by a turbulent world. When Hanuman met Ram for the first time in the forest and recognized him as the very object of his devotion, he fell prostrate before him. Ram accepted Hanuman as his dear devotee. When Hanuman saw that his Lord was gracious to him, his heart rejoiced and all sorrows disappeared.

देखि पवनसुत पति अनुकूला ।

हृदयै हरष बीति सब सूला ॥ (4: 3, 1)

The bhakta sees the whole universe suffused with Supreme Spirit. He sees Paramatman's loving presence within himself and others, and in the whole creation. This gives him the driving force to love and serve others. He feels in himself the joy and pain of his fellow creatures. He may not speculate on his unity with the whole universe, but he lives in harmony with it. When he serves his neighbour he knows that he is serving his Lord. Even when a bhakta is not able to bring much material comfort and consolation to his suffering neighbour, his very presence in a spirit of solidarity, alleviates the suffering and intensifies the joy of his neighbours as the old saying goes: "Joy shared is doubled and sorrow shared is halved". Joy and sorrow are also the lot of the bhakta. He too has his own experiences of these. He shares his joy with others and gratefully accepts from them support and consolation, even while he knows that his only definitive support is the Lord. Thus he lives in solidarity with his fellow beings.

Every devotee knows that submission to the will of God is as important as service, spiritual wisdom and emotional attachment. It is only through obedience to God's will that love is tested. From the story of Bharat we know that he gained peace and joy immediately as he decided to accept the wish of Ram to return to Ayodhya and rule over its people in his name.

Kakabhushundi the propounder of bhaktimarga says: "People strive for spiritual perfection in many ways and some have reached great heights of spiritual attainment. Others are completely detached from desires. Some others are indifferent to the pairs of opposites, like cold and heat, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. There are poets, learned men, and knowers of the secrets of action (krutajna). There are yogis, sannyasis and men of valour. Still others are great ascetics, men of piety, learning or wisdom. But none of these will cross the ocean of sansara unless they serve my Lord, Ram. (Final liberation can only be through bhakti.) I bow my head again and again to him in worship.

साधक सिद्ध बिमुक्त उदासी ।
 कबि कोबिद कृतग्य संन्यासी ॥
 जोगी सूर सुतापस ग्यानी ।
 धर्म निरत पंडित बिग्यानी ॥
 तरहिं न बिनु सेँ मम स्वामी ।
 राम नमामि नमामि नमामि ॥ (7: 123, 3, 4)

The goal of bhakti is final liberation. This liberation is the cessation of sansara, the cycle of transmigration. More than that, it is the supreme, the highest state of the experience of the Absolute Reality, Parabrahman. Of course this experience is a transcendental reality which is beyond our grasp, and therefore indescribable. It is the realization of union (not identity, as in abhedabhakti) of the Individual Self with the Universal Self. This union destroys every bond of karma, and bestows on the bhakta perfect and enduring happiness and peace. All doubts are resolved, the veil of ignorance is removed for ever and faith is transformed into direct vision, face to face with Paramatman. This is the

climax (but an ever enduring climax), of God experience. Tulsidas calls it ananya bhakti (single hearted unalloyed devotion). Saint Paul paints it in other words: "Things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2,9). According to Tulsidas the bhaktas (devotees of Sagunabrahman) do not aspire for Kaivalya (the moksha of abheda bhakti), but for ananyabhakti, which Ram will grant them.

सगुनोपासक मोछ न लेहीं ।

तिन्ह कहूँ राम भगति निज देहीं ॥ (6: 111, 4)

This ananya bhakti is granted ordinarily after this life on earth, but some exceptional souls receive it even during this life, like sage Kakabhushundi, as a boon.

CHAPTER FOUR

BHAKTAS OF RAM

In the previous chapter we have seen the nature and attributes of bhakti, also the means of attaining bhakti and the fruits thereof. In this chapter we meet some of the saints of Ramcharitmanas whose lives exemplify bhakti. These bhaktas belong to different categories, ascetics, householders, rakshasas, monkeys, bears, birds and gods.

SECTION ONE

ASCETICS

Narad is an interesting personality who appears in the different critical stages of the story of Ram. We have seen how Narad's curse was one of the reasons for the descent of Vishnu as Ram. He was a great devotee of Ram and he played a prominent role in the story of Ram as the sage of gods.

Narad often felt sad that he had cursed Vishnu and that he was the reason for all the sufferings of Ram, Sita and Laxshman. Once, while Ram and Laxshman were sitting near the lake Pampa during their anxious search for Sita, Narad came with his Veena to comfort them. After singing the praises of Ram, he asked him why, in the form of Vishnu, he had obstructed his marriage with princess Viswamohini, because of which he had cursed Vishnu. Ram told him that it was to protect him from the terrible meshes of illusion which the marriage would have entangled him in. Then Ram spoke to him of the qualities and attributes of saints, and sent him back to the world of Brahma.

Narad followed the war of Lanka very closely. When he saw that Ram was bound with snakes by Meghnath, he immediately sent the eagle Garuda who ate up all the snakes and freed Ram. Narad remained always a bhakta and his friendly visits continued also after Ram had returned to Ayodhya and established his kingdom.

We have already heard how the great Valmiki turned away from robbery and became a great saint and devotee of Ram. Sarbhanga was an old sage who was ready to leave for the world of the gods. But his longing to meet Ram in this world itself kept him alive. During the forest wanderings Ram, Sita and Lakshman went to his ashram. He was overjoyed and offered all the merits he had acquired during his long life of asceticism at Ram's feet and obtained from him the boon of unalloyed devotion (ananya bhakti). Then he prepared a pyre and entered the fire of self renunciation and went to the world of Vishnu.

Muni Sutikshna was a disciple of the great Agastya, and a bhakta of Ram. Hearing that Ram was passing through the forest, he ran to meet him. But the very expectation of meeting Ram transported him to ecstasy. Forgetting the way, he began to sing and dance. Seeing this Ram appeared to him in the form of Vishnu and consoled him, and granted him his wish that Ram should always dwell in his heart. On meeting Ram he made an excuse of showing the way to Agastya's ashram and accompanied him to be in his company for a little more time.

One of the touching stories of Ramcharitmanas is Ram's meeting Sabri the sanniyasini. She welcomed Ram and Lakshman with great respect and affection. They enjoyed the simple forest produce of fruits and roots she offered them. She humbled herself before Ram, saying that she was of low birth (being a member of the forest tribe, sabra) and a woman without wisdom or virtue. Ram brushed all that aside saying that he was not concerned with rank or accomplishments, but only with love and bhakti. Then Ram introduced her to the nine forms of bhakti. Assuring her that her devotion was pure and perfect, he asked whether she knew anything about the whereabouts of Sita. Sabri directed them to lake Pampa and asked them to meet Sugriv who would help them in their search. Her longing to meet Ram fulfilled, she entered the fire of yoga (yogagni), gave up her earthly life and reached the final goal.

Swarnaprabha (her name is not found in Ramcharitmanas, but in Adhyatma Ramayan) was the sannyasini who was of great help to the search party of Sita. She fed the monkeys and bears on the sweet fruit of her garden and by her extraordinary ascetical power transported them to the sea-shore over against Lanka in the fraction of a moment. Then she went and met Ram in Rishyamook, obtained from him the boon of ananya bhakti and went further to Bhadrinath, there to continue her ascetic life.

(According to Hindu belief birds and animals too are endowed with an immortal spirit like human beings. They too are capable of doing good and evil in the moral sense. They also can be sages and bhaktas of God. Kakabhushundi was a great sage who was turned into a crow by the curse of sage Lomash).

After Shiva, Kakabhushundi is the greatest of the bhaktas of Ram. A major part of the Uttarkand of Ramcharitmanas is devoted to his story and his teaching on bhakti, given to Garuda, the vehicle of god Vishnu. Garuda was sent to him by Shiva himself as the former was troubled by doubts as to Ram's identity with Parabrahman. Kakabhushundi resolved Garuda's doubts and taught him the secrets of bhakti.

Kakabhushundi was born a sudra in Ayodhya. When a great famine struck Ayodhya he went to Ujjain to earn his living. In course of time he got a little rich, he became a worshipper of Shiva and took for his guru a kind and patient brahmin who also was a devotee of Shiva. Once while Kakabhushundi was worshipping in the temple, his guru happened to go there. In his arrogance Kakabhushundi did not stand up and salute his guru. This enraged Shiva so much that he cursed him with ten thousand animal births full of suffering. The kind guru heard the curse and felt very sorry. Reciting 'the rudrakshtak' (the eight verses of praise and supplication to Shiva) he humbly asked pardon for his disciple. Shiva, thus propitiated, changed the curse to a thousand births without suffering. Moreover he gave the boon of Rambhakti to Kakabhushundi.

After a thousand births Kakabhushundi was born as a

brahmin. He went from ashram to ashram listening to the story of Ram, until finally he reached the ashram of sage Lomash. Lomash was a follower of the way of knowledge (abheda bhakti). While Lomash spoke of Nirgunabrahman and knowledge, Kakabhushundi argued with him in favour of bhakti to Sagunabrahman and obstinately stuck to it. This incensed the sage so much that he told him to become a crow. The same instant he turned into a crow. That is how this great bhakta of Ram came to be known by the name Kakabhushundi (kaka means crow). Kakabhushundi did not feel unhappy at this change, but humbly bowed his head at the feet of Lomash and accepted the curse.

Lomash, however felt very sorry for his words and gave Kakabhushundi the power to change from his crow form to any other form any time he wished. He kept him in the ashram for many more days and narrated to him the story of Ram. Ram himself appeared to Kakabhushundi and gave him the much coveted boon of ananya bhakti. He does not want to change into any other form than that of the crow as it was in that form that he received the boon. Death will have no power over him, he is immortal. Kakabhushundi flew to a high mountain far north of Mount Sumeru and settled there. This mountain has four golden peaks. On one peak there grows a banyan tree, on the second a peepul, on the third a pakar and on the fourth a mango tree. On the highest peak is a beautiful lake of clear and sweet water filled with colourful fishes. Plenty of swans swim in the lake and numerous droves of humming bees bring honey home from the flower laden trees around. Kakabhushundi worships under all these trees, but relates the story of Ram only from under the banyan tree. All kinds of birds gather there to listen to Ramkatha. Shiva himself frequents the place in the guise of a swan to listen to the story again and again. It was sage Kakabhushundi who first narrated the Ramkatha to Yagnavalkya who in turn told it to Bhardwaj through whom the story of Ram has spread all over the world.

The great sages like Agastya, Viswamitra, Sanak and his brothers¹⁴ were all bhaktas of Ram. Tulsidas puts the praises of Ram on their lips. However as he is proposing the

way of bhakti to the ordinary man in the turbulent ocean of life, he presents to us several bhaktas from among the forest tribes, the rakshasas, the bears and the monkeys.

THE COMMON PEOPLE

The story of the kevat (boatman), whose name is not mentioned in the Ramcharitmanas is a telling example of simple devotion. When Guha, the king of the Nishads called for the boatman to ferry Ram and his party across the Ganges, he came, but without the boat. The kevat explained the reason. He had heard that the dust from Ram's feet had touched a stone in the forest and that stone immediately turned into the wife of a muni. He was afraid to take Ram in his boat, lest some dust from his feet fall on it and it suddenly turn into a woman. After all, the wooden boat was much softer than a stone in the forest. If his boat became a woman how could he earn his and his family's living? However, he would gladly take them over the river, provided Ram allowed him to wash his feet clear of all dust before stepping into the boat. So with Ram's smiling assent the kevat brought a wooden trough with water, washed Ram's feet, he and his family drank the water and then gladly took the party over the Ganges. Reaching the other shore, Ram was wondering whether to give the Kevat some remuneration, afraid to offend him by paying for such a loving service. Seeing the embarrassment of Ram Sita took out a ring from one of her fingers and offered it to the boatman, which he tactfully declined saying that he would surely accept a payment when he would have the pleasure of taking them back over the river on their return journey to Ayodhya. This story has such an impact on the common people, that they tell it with all sorts of embellishments. And kevat is their model for humble service and bhakti.

Guha was an intimate friend and devotee of Ram. His subjects the Nishads also were true bhaktas. They were ready to fight even Bharat, when they suspected him of foul play with Ram. The simple people of the forests through which Ram passed became his friends and devotees. They fed him and his guests with simple things they could gather

from the forests. Tulsidas uses a capturing simile to show the worth of the devotion of simple people. The people of Ayodhya had come with Bharat to Chitrakoot where Ram was staying. The people of Ram's own city were like a boat carrying human beings over the vast ocean of sansara. The forest tribes of Chitrakoot on the other hand, were like blocks of iron which could sink into the bottom of the ocean, because they were heavy with ignorance. But bhakti made them so enlightened that they were a strong support even to the devout people of Ayodhya. They had become so buoyant that it was they who carried forward the ship of Ayodhya over the vast ocean of transmigration. It was as if a loaded ship was kept afloat and sailing by the blocks of iron.

RAKSHASAS

Mareech the rakshas was a friend of Ravan. He possessed magical powers. Therefore Ravan went to him for help in abducting Sita. Mareech being a bhakta of Ram, tried to dissuade Ravan from his evil designs, but under duress he had to submit to Ravan. He decided that it was far better to die at the hands of Ram and gain liberation, than to be killed by Ravan by disobeying him. Mareech felt happy at heart that he was going to meet his friend Ram that very day. But hid this fact from Ravan.

मन अति हरष जनाव न तेही ।
आजु देखिहउँ परम सनेही ॥ (3: 25, 4)

So Mareech took the guise of a beautiful golden deer, went to Ram's hut and led him away from the hut. He could not resist his desire to look back at Ram, the object of his love and devotion, again and again even while running for his life. Finally, receiving Ram's fatal arrow, he fell down with a terrible cry and died remembering, Ram¹ with affection. Ram granted him Vaikuntha.

We have already met Vibhishan, the brother of Ravan. He had persevered in his devotion to Ram in the most trying circumstances of his life among the wicked rakshasas. He incurred the rage of Ravan by speaking up for Ram. He had

to run away from his brother and take refuge with Ram, whose intimate friend and counsellor he became.

Mandodari the wife of Ravan was a wise lady and devotee of Ram. In spite of her repeated attempts, she could not make her wicked husband realize the foolishness of his plans. Ram treated her with respect, as is clear from the fact that his arrows brought the heads and arms of Ravan and placed them in front of her.

Trijata was one of the good rakshasis in Ravan's service. She was a bhakta of Ram, and a source of great consolation to Sita, during her stay in Lanka. Ravan's brother Kumbhakarna and son Prahasta and some of his councillors and spies are also depicted as devotees of Ram, even though, under pressure from Ravan, they had to fight him.

Ravan himself, according to Tulsidas, was a bhakta of Ram at heart. In his previous birth he was the good king Pratapbhanu. Through no fault of his he was cursed by the brahmins to become a rakshas. Ravan was also a descendant of the famous sage Pulastya and he possessed great spiritual wisdom. Tulsidas says that Ravan had cleverly preplanned the abduction of Sita, the war with Ram and death by his arrows, with the object of attaining the final goal of liberation. Ravan knew that bhakti was impossible in his body dominated by ignorance. So he said to himself: "I shall force a war on Ram, die by his arrow, and obtain release from this world of transmigration".

तौ मैं जाइ बैरु हठि करऊँ ।

प्रभु सर प्रान तजै भव तरऊँ ॥ (3: 22, 2)

Eventually Ravan died at the hands of Ram and attained the final release. All the sons of Ravan and his army of rakshasas, Ram sent to his own abode, the Vaikuntha. Thus Tulsidas shows the infinite mercy and liberality of Ram who granted final release even to his enemies.

MONKEYS, BEARS, BIRDS

Angad was the son of Bali, the brother of Sugriv. He was faithful to Ram ever since he joined Ram after his father's death. It was Angad whom Ram sent as his messenger to

Ravan, to offer him peace. Angad fulfilled his mission with exceptional courage, challenging Ravan in Ram's name. As Ram's warrior he was fearless and fierce. In Ayodhya Angad was overcome with sadness at his parting with Ram. Ram was his only support and protection, especially as Bali, when dying, had entrusted him to Ram. At the parting moment Ram raised up the prostrate Angad and embraced him. He garlanded him with his own garland and put his own robes and jewels on him. On leaving the palace he was looking back again and again to Ram with woefilled eyes. He sent a special message to Ram with Hanuman that Ram should never forget him, but think of him frequently. Hearing this Ram was so moved that he fell silent for a long time.

We come across several bhaktas among the monkeys like Hanuman, Sugriv, Nal and Neel. Hanuman is the greatest of them about whom we shall speak more in detail in the second section of this chapter.

Jambavan, the bear, too was a great bhakta as well as a wise counsellor of Ram. The old bird Jatayu sacrificed his life for rescuing Sita and died in Ram's own hands. The eagle Garuda, Vishnu's vehicle, went to Kakabhushundi to resolve his doubts about Ram and received the sublime teaching on bhakti from him. Kakabhushundi we have met already among the bhaktas who were also sages. Many birds go to Kakabhushundi to listen to the story of Ram, it is said.

THE GODS

Like human beings gods too can be devotees of Ram. The greater gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are Ram's devotees. Shiva is the greatest of all the bhaktas among gods, human beings and others. Devotion to Shiva is a necessary condition to attain bhakti to Ram. Even those who have reached the summit of spiritual attainment cannot become devotees of Ram without help of Shiva.

Shiva's bhakti to Ram was so intense that he deserted his own dear wife Sati, because she doubted Ram's being the Descent of Parabrahman and tried to resolve her doubt by taking the disguise of Sita and confronting Ram in the forest

while he was on the search for Sita. Shiva was so disconcerted by this unbecoming act of Sati, that he left her and went to the Himalayas to practise asceticism. He took her back only in her rebirth as Parvati, a chastened person and a bhakta of Ram. While narrating the story of Ram, Shiva would often be taken up into ecstasy. It is said that he whispers the holy name of Ram into the ears of persons dying in his city, Kashi, and they attain final liberation.

Tulsidas has scant respect for the devotion of the minor gods like Indra and others. The bhakti of these gods is motivated by crass self interest. They have no faith or trust in Ram, they were always suspicious. They plotted against the coronation of Ram as the crown prince of Ayodhya so that he would be available for them in the forest to rid them of the harassment of rakshasas. So the gods are not true bhaktas, but hypocrites. They occupy exalted positions but are mean and jealous by nature. They are displeased at the happiness and prosperity of others. However, they are in the forefront to make a show of their 'bhakti'. They are the first to shower flowers from the heavens and loudest in singing Ram's praises, whenever an occasion presents itself. All this show of devotion is but eyewash.

Tulsidas insists that bhakti ought to be pure and unmixed, 'nishkeval prem' love without selfish motive. The bhaktas' heart should be free of all guile. He must accept Paramatman as his only support, the depository of all his trust. He should have shraddha, loving attention for him, and complete faith in him.

SECTION TWO

In the first section of this chapter we have met many bhaktas of Ram. This section we shall devote to two greatest of the bhaktas, Bharat and Hanuman.

BHARAT

For Tulsidas, Bharat, the brother of Ram, is the ideal bhakta. To understand the bhakti of Bharat, it is good to place him in the context in which his bhakti shines forth vividly, namely the intrigue of Kaikeyi. So we shall describe

his Rambhakti as we tell the story of the intrigue in Dasrath's palace and Bharat's response.

The age of the Ramayana was an age of intrigues, especially among royalty. This is clear from the stories of Dasrath and Kaikeyi, Sugriv and Bali, Ravan and Vibhishan. It was high intrigue that was played in Dasrath's palace. Ram, being the eldest son of Dasrath, had the full right to succeed to his father's throne. Besides, the Kulguru Vasishtha had given his consent to Dasrath's decision to install Ram as the crown prince. But Kaikeyi wanted her son, Bharat to succeed Dasrath. She played her game with shrewdness and determination. Kaikeyi stood her ground in demanding the coronation of Bharat and sending Ram to the forest for fourteen years, in order to give time to Bharat to establish himself as the undisputed ruler of Ayodhya. Kaikeyi's demands, even though unjust, had a semblance of legality as Dasrath had promised her any two favours she chose. So Dasrath had to give in to the wishes of Kaikeyi, much against himself.

Bharat was away when all this was happening, and he was completely unaware of these developments. So when he and Sathrugna returned to the palace on Vasishtha's call, after Dasrath's death, he was thoroughly shocked. He felt very bitter towards his mother who was offering him the kingship of Ayodhya on a platter. The offer of his mother added fuel to the fire of sorrow at his father's death. True, it was but natural that as a Kshatriya Bharat would never despise the kingship. But in Bharat's case, his loyalty and devotion to his brother far outweighed his ambitions. He was overwhelmed with sadness on the thought of Ram, Sita and Lakshman in the forest, suffering the hardships of such a life, and that because of him, at least so he thought. A feeling of contempt and aversion for his mother overcame him. He lamented his misfortune to be born of such a mother.

Even at this moment Bharat's goodness was evident when he intervened to protect the wicked Manthara, the maid-servant of Kaikeyi, from Sathrugna who after felling her with a kick was dragging her by her hair along the floor of the room.

When Vasishtha and the people wanted him to become king, Bharat begged for their permission to go and meet Ram and persuade him to come back to Ayodhya. With their approval he organized a deputation of the queens, the Kulguru, the minister, a contingent of the army and the elders of Ayodhya to go to Chitrakoot and meet Ram and request him to return. He took his mother with him so that she could obtain forgiveness from Ram and become reconciled with him. In this too we see the goodness of Bharat.

While Bharat and party were approaching Shringaverpur, Guha the Nishad King suspected his intentions, as he was accompanied by the army. Fearing foul play he alerted his army and went to find out. Meeting Bharat Guha got convinced of his loyalty and bhakti towards Ram and became his guide to Chitrakoot.

For Bharat, the journey to Chitrakoot was really a pilgrimage. Walking barefoot, feet full of blisters, he reached Prayag where he refreshed himself with a bath in the Triveni (the confluence of the three sacred rivers viz. the Ganges, the Jamuna and the invisible Saraswati). There he prayed for unalloyed devotion to Ram in his present and future lives. He had no other desire in his heart. He despised even the four goals of life, artha, kama, dharma and moksha. Not even the ultimate goal of life, Moksha, could divert him from his longing for bhakti at Ram's feet in all his successive births.

अरथ न धरम न काम रुचि गति न चहउँ निरबान ।

जनम जनम रति राम पद यह बरदानु न आन ॥ (2: 204)

In Prayag Bharat went to the great sage Bhardwaj to pay him respects. Bhardwaj assured him that he (Bharat) was the very incarnation of love for Ram. This assurance consoled the anxious and worried Bharat.

तुम्ह तौ भरत मोर मत एह ।

धरै देह जनु राम सनेह ॥ (2: 207, 4)

Bhardwaj further assured him that all the calamity that happened in Ayodhya was no fault of his. Bharat's response

to his mother's intrigue would serve the very cause of Rambhakti. He would become the ideal of bhaktas. Then Bhardwaj told him the story of his ancestor Bhagirath who brought down the celestial river Ganges to the earth. Bharat, like him would bring the Ganges of bhakti to the world.

Seeing Bharat, the great bhakta of Ram, nature itself responded by softening the earth under his feet, sent clouds and breeze to protect him from heat and made the trees flower in abundance, thus making his journey comfortable and pleasant.

Tulsidas says that all the animate and inanimate beings of the world who saw Ram, or whom Ram saw, had only merited liberation, but those who saw Bharat were instantly liberated from the bonds of transmigration.

जड़ चेतन मा जीव धरे ।

जे चितए प्रभु जिन्ह प्रभु हेरे ॥

ते सब भए परम पद जोगू ।

भरत दरस मेटा भव रोगू ॥ (2: 216, 1)

As we shall see later (p. 106) how the gods who were disturbed on seeing all this was advised by Brihaspati to cultivate bhakti to Bharat rather than to Ram. "Because bhakti to Bharat is the source of all blessings in the world"

सकल सुमंगल मूल जग भरत चरन अनुरागु । (2: 265)

The pilgrims from Ayodhya to Chitrakoot were approaching the place where Ram was staying. From far already, Guha pointed out Ram's ashram to Bharat. Immediately, Bharat got down from his chariot and started walking barefoot. Seeing Bharat accompanied by soldiers, Lakshman suspected foul play. The angry Lakshman got ready to fight Bharat. He became calm only when Ram himself convinced him of the genuineness of Bharat's bhakti and love, and his contempt for kingship. With love and affection Bharat took the dust from the footprints of Ram and marked his forehead, eyes and heart with it.

Seeing the devotion of Bharat, the nature around was enchanted. The gods showered flowers. Guha himself forgot

the way. The munis who were sitting around Ram started praising Bharat's bhakti, saying: "It is indeed Bharat's bhakti that upholds the universe".

On reaching the hut, Ram and Bharat embraced each other with great affection. Ram consoled Kaikeyi assuring her that she was not at any fault, but everything happened under the designs of destiny. Ram fulfilled Bharat's wish by reconciling himself with Kaikeyi. With great humility and love Ram held Kaikey's feet in his hands and requested her to forget everything that had happened. Kaikeyi too repented of her evil actions.

Bharat and the people of Ayodhya joined Ram in his fast of two days, abstaining even from water. The forest dwellers brought roots and fruits from the jungles to break their fast. Worrying how he could persuade Ram to return to Ayodhya, Bharat spent the days and nights without rest or sleep. In his indecision he felt like a fish caught in slush, unable to get free. He was wondering whether Kausalya or Vasishtha could come to his rescue, but reached the conclusion that they would not be persistent or obstinate with Ram.

Ram himself showered abundant praise on Bharat's bhakti: "By the very remembrance of your name men are freed from sin and the hordes of the evil passions and earn praise in this world and happiness in the next. I say the truth, Shiva is my witness, when I tell you: Bharat, it is you who sustain this earth".

मिटिहहिं पाप प्रपंच सब अखिल अमंगल भार ।
लोक सुजसु परलोक सुख सुमिरत नाम तुम्हार ॥
कहउँ सुभाउ सत्य सिव साखी ।
भरत भूमि रह राजरि राखी ॥ (2: 263 और 263-1)

Vasishtha called a meeting of the people to discuss the subject of Ram's return. In the meeting Bharat volunteered to go and live in the forest instead of Ram, Sita and Lakshman. He was willing even to spend the rest of his life in the forest provided Ram would return. The people approved his proposal and they all went to Ram.

At this moment the gods, fearing that their plans to keep Ram in the forest will be frustrated, tried to persuade goddess Saraswati to distort the mind of Bharat. Saraswati, however, refused, saying that even the great gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva could not change the mind of a bhakta like Bharat whose heart was filled with the light of Bhakti.

During the discussions Ram was so influenced by the bhakti of Bharat that he was even prepared to return to Ayodhya in order to make Bharat happy. But meanwhile Bharat, after intense mental struggle had decided to submit himself to the wishes of Ram, because he said in his heart that a genuine bhakta should obey his Lord. It was a decision of self-surrender to Ram. He put himself wholeheartedly at the service of Ram, and asked for favour of his command.

On Bharat's request for a command, Ram entrusted him with the government of Ayodhya till his return from the forest. That would be the share of Bharat in the fulfilling of Dasrath's command to Ram, to live fourteen years in the forest. Bharat accepted Ram's command with great joy saying: "My life finds its fulfilment in the obedience to your command. I feel as happy as if I was wandering with you in the forest. Only give me a sign of your presence with me, so that I may be helped to fulfil all your wishes". Ram gave him his slippers, which Bharat would install on the throne of Ayodhya and worship daily. All were happy and praised the devotion of Bharat.

After visiting the sages and symbolically crowning Ram as the King of Ayodhya, Bharat returned home as Ram's regent. He made a simple hut in a village near Ayodhya, called Nandigram and stayed there as an ascetic, and ruled the country well.

"Ram, Sita and Lakshman live in the forest. Bharat lives in his house (his hut in Nandigram). He disciplines himself by asceticism and penance. Considering the lives of both, the people of Ayodhya conclude that Bharat deserves more praise on all accounts". . . . says Tulsidas.

लखन राम सिय कानन बसहीं ।
 भरतु भवन बसि तप तनु कसहीं ॥
 दोउ दिसि समुझि कहत सबु लोगू ।
 सब बिधि भरत सराहन जोगू ॥ (2: 325, 1-2)

Bharat's life of renunciation is considered more sublime because Ram has taken to the life of asceticism in pursuance of his father's command whereas Bharat has embraced the life of penance and mortification on his own free choice renouncing the comforts and pleasures of the palace. Thus Bharat has become the model of asceticism and bhakti for the householder.

While the whole world worships Ram, Ram himself worships Bharat, his bhakta, says Brihaspati, the guru of gods. A bhakta like Bharat can never deviate from the path of righteousness. So Vasishtha assures him that whatever he thinks, speaks or does will serve as the standard of dharma for all people in the world.

समुझब कहब करब तुम्ह जोई ।
 धरम सारु जग होइहि सोई ॥ (2: 322, 4)

"Bharat's devotion would not allow him to be intoxicated by kingship. Even if he were to gain the position of Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva he would not become proud. Can a few drops of sour porridge make the vast ocean of milk sour?" says Ram to Lakshman who was afraid that Bharat had come to Chitrakoot to challenge Ram to fight.

भरतहि होइ न राजमदु बिधि हरि हर पद पाइ ।
 कबहुँ कि काँजी सीकरनि छीरसिंघु बिनसाइ ॥ (2: 231)

According to Ram himself, the three periods of time, the past, present and future, the three worlds, that of gods, of men and of demons are under the dominion of Bharat. Those who think evil of Bharat will be punished with unhappiness in this world and the next. Bharat's name is so great that by its very remembrance evil would flee from one's heart and one will attain happiness both here and hereafter. Bharat is the mainstay of this earth. Bharat himself says: "It

is good to suffer all the agonies of this sansara for your sake. Moksha itself is worthless without you, oh Ram !”

राउर बदि भल भव दुख दाह ।

प्रभु बिनु बादि परम पद लाह ॥ (2: 313, 1)

“Who but Bharat, the greatest of the bhaktas of Ram could show the way to renunciation and heights of holiness unattainable even by great ascetics? What but his pure fame could deliver mankind from the flames of suffering and evil? Who else could lead men to unalloyed devotion? Who but Bharat could have turned the hearts of hardened sinners of Kaliyuga, like Tulsidas, to Ram?” exclaims Tulsidas.

HANUMAN

It is true that Bharat is the ideal bhakta of Ram. However Hanuman the bhakta has found a bigger place in the esteem and affection of the people. The Hanuman temples strewn all over India is a testimony to this.

Hanuman's bhakti to Ram is a happy fusion of service to his master and concern for the well-being of others. Let us explain this through a few examples. Hanuman alerts the forgetful Sugriv of the urgency of fulfilling his promise to help Ram to find Sita. He pacifies the angry Lakshman who comes to take Sugriv to Ram to answer for his negligence in fulfilling his pledge. He goes to look for water to refresh the tired and thirsty monkeys and bears, during their search for Sita, and brings them to a water hole.

In the war with Ravan, Hanuman takes the brunt of the fight. He is the ever ready volunteer to come to the rescue of the warriors in distress. He carries the unconscious Lakshman to Ram, brings Vaidya (Doctor) Sushen, brings the 'plant' of life (Sanjivani) for reviving Lakshman and again joins battle, without respite. He is tireless in his efforts to bring Sita and entrust her to his Lord. With enormous courage, strength and skill he overcomes all the obstacles on the way of accomplishing his missions of mercy and service; all this because of his deep trust in and devotion to Ram.

Hanuman is a late comer in the Ramkatha. He made his first appearance only in the fourth book, Kishkinda kand, when he was sent out by Sugriv to enquire about Ram and Lakshman who were roaming the forest near Sugriv's hide-out. On hearing Ram's name and parentage Hanuman immediately recognized him as his Lord, and filled with bhakti fell at his feet. Tulsidas says that the moment Hanuman understood that his Lord was gracious to him, all his sorrows fled and his heart was filled with happiness.

देखि पवनसुत पति अनुकूला ।
हृदयै हरष बीति सब सूला ॥ (4: 3-1)

He took both Ram and Lakshman on his back and brought them to Sugriv and pleaded their cause. In order to find Sita who was in the Ashokvan (forest of Ashoka trees) in Lanka, Hanuman jumped over the ocean, a hundred leagues wide. Nothing stood on his way when it was the question of doing a service to Ram. Seeing Hanuman getting ready for his leap over the ocean, the ocean god asked mount Mainak to offer him some rest by letting him sleep on the mountain for a while. Hanuman touching Mainak paid her homage and gratefully declined the offer saying that he would not rest till he had finished Ram's work.

हनुमान तेहि परसा कर पुनि कीन्ह प्रनाम ।
राम काजु कीन्है बिनु मोहि कहाँ बिश्राम ॥ (5: 1)

Again, leaping the ocean he came across Sursa the mother of the serpents, who waylaid him and threatened to swallow him. Hanuman begged her to allow him first to complete Ram's mission. After that he would come back to her to be swallowed. Sursa would not agree, she began to grow in size and open her mouth wide.

Hanuman however kept on enlarging himself double size of her mouth, until Sursa opened her mouth a hundred leagues wide. Suddenly Hanuman shrank in size, entered her mouth and passed through the other end before Sursa could shrink. Seeing the cleverness of Hanuman she was pleased. She blessed him with success and went her way.

When it was a mission of mercy Hanuman was full of concern and urgency.

Just as for Bharat, for Hanuman too the only goal of his life was to fulfil the wishes of Ram, his master. For both of them bhakti did consist so much in worship and adoration as in obeying the command of the Lord.

Hanuman is a person of great sensitivity. He considered Sita as his own mother. He spoke to her with great delicacy and feeling. He was kind not only to his friends, but also to his enemies like Ravan, whom he tried to persuade to become a devotee of Ram. He was a humble 'monkey' who could laugh over himself saying to Vibhishan: We are not high born but frivolous monkeys, low in every way. If any one utters our name in the morning, he will go without food the whole day."

कहहु कवन मैं परम कुलीना ।
कपि चंचल सबहीं बिधि हीना ॥
प्रात लेइ जो नाम हमारा ।
तेहि दिन ताहि न मिलै अहारा ॥ (5: 6, 4)

Service to Ram was so much in his heart that when all the friends left Ayodhya, Hanuman remained at Ram's palace with the sole purpose of serving him. Hanuman's story is full of service to Ram and to his fellow beings. He is always prepared to come to the help of others. In Ramcharitmanas we see that he is always approached for any extraordinary task. So it is not without reason that people have given the name "Sankatmochan" (the deliverer from dangers and sorrows) and qualified him 'Kripānidhan' (fountain of compassion). Ram himself is very grateful for the services and loyalty of Hanuman and is liberal in expressing his gratitude. When Hanuman brought the news of Sita from Lanka, Ram thanked him with tears in his eyes. This touched Hanuman so much, that overcome with emotion he fell at Ram's feet repeating: "Lord save". This expression of bhakti by Hanuman so moved Shiva, who was telling the story to Parvati, that Shiva himself went into ecstasy.

Hanuman is also called Mahavir (the one with great power). He shows his extraordinary power in the superhuman feats he does, like leaping over the ocean, carrying mountains, fighting Ravan etc. but all this power comes from Ram. The very remembrance of Ram's name makes him powerful to do the impossible. Shiva tells Parvati that the 'monkey' (Hanuman) does all this, not by his own might, but through the power of the Lord which can swallow even the god Yama, the Lord of death.

उमा न कष्टु कपि कै अधिकार्ई ।

प्रभु प्रताप जो कालहि खाई ॥ (5: 2, 5)

Hanuman himself is aware of it. He tells Sita: "A monkey as I am, I am neither shrewd nor strong. But with the power of the Lord, even the smallest snake can devour the eagle Garuda (who is the swallower of the snakes).

सुनु माता साखामृग नहिं बल बुद्धि बिसाल ।

प्रभु प्रताप ते गरुड़हि खाई परम लघु ब्याल ॥ (5: 16)

Another fact which makes Hanuman dear to the people is the suitable humour Tulsidas uses in narrating his story. After meeting Sita in the Ashokvan in Lanka, before taking leave of her, he humbly requests 'permission' from her to eat some of the sweet fruits of the garden, because he was extremely hungry. In spite of Sita's warning that terrible Rakshasas were guarding the orchard, he climbed the trees and started eating the fruits and tearing down the branches. When the rakshasas came to stop him, he killed some of them and hammered the others. Questioned by Ravan he simply said that after all it was natural for a monkey to eat sweet fruits, and when the guards came to obstruct him, he killed some of them and hammered others. Sent to bring Sushen to Ram, Hanuman brought the whole house with Sushen in it. On reaching the mountain in search of Sanjivani he could not recognize it, so he plucked and brought the whole mountain to Sushen and let him look for it himself.

It is no wonder that such a bhakta of Ram is loved and

revered by the people. As we have seen, Hanuman by the very loving remembrance of Ram's name receives Ram's own power. People believe that it is Hanuman who can bring them favours and fulfil their seemingly impossible longings through his immense influence with Ram. Indeed who of us have no 'impossible' longing in his heart?

Irrespective of rank or position, people throng to the shrines of Hanuman with their petitions. It is a beautiful sight, especially on Tuesday and Saturday evenings to see young and old, rich and poor, high and low praying at the temple of Sankatmochan at Varanasi. There are few places of pilgrimage where there reigns a sphere of silence and prayer among the immense crowds of people pressing against one another, as in Sankatmochan.

It is the custom among the people to invoke the blessings of Hanuman before chanting Ramcharitmanas. He is one of the most loved family deities. He is a compassionate god and is therefore very accessible. As Tulsidas teaches, a real bhakta of Ram can never do harm to any one, but is intent on doing good. So it is in the logic of things that Hanuman as one of the greatest bhaktas of Ram enjoys great popularity and sometimes appears to be the object of devotion even more than Ram himself.

In the beginning of Sundar kand, Tulsidas pays homage to Hanuman in the following words:

अतुलितबलधामं हेमशैलाभदेहं
 दनुजवनकृशानुं ज्ञानिनामग्रगण्यम् ।
 सकलगुणनिधानं बानराणामधीशं
 रघुपतिप्रियभक्तं वातजातं नमामि ॥ (5: sloka 3)

"I worship Hanuman, son of the Wind God, incomparable in strength, with a body shining like a mountain of gold. He is the fire destroying the 'forest' of Rakshasas. The greatest of the sages, the repository of all virtues, the lord of the monkeys, the bhakta dearest to Ram, I bow my head to him."

CHAPTER FIVE

RAMRAJYA

Man is a social being. The society in which he lives has much to contribute to his well-being or otherwise. When the society was tribal, their welfare was looked after by their chiefs and their simple rules. In course of time several tribes formed into kingdoms or nation states ruled by kings. The king was the supreme law giver, administrator and judge. Prosperity or adversity, freedom or slavery of the people ultimately depended on the king. He was the master of life and death over his subjects. That is why saint Tulsidas insists that the primary duty of a monarch is to make his people happy. He gives a dire warning to bad rulers when he says: "The king whose subjects are unhappy definitely merits hell".

जासु राज प्रिय प्रजा दुखारी ।
सो नृप अवसि नरक अधिकारी ॥ (2: 70, 3)

Through the words of sage Kakabhushundi, Tulsidas conveys to us the picture of his own times. The world as he knew it, was a world of wickedness and evil. People disregarded the injunctions of the scriptures, neglected the duties of caste and state of life. They wallowed in sin. Even though their span of life was short, their arrogance was such that it seemed that they would not die even on the day of universal destruction (pralaya). Lust, greed, dishonesty and hypocrisy were rampant.

The preceptors (gurus) robbed their disciples of money, unconcerned about their ignorance or troubles. Ascetics became rich by fleecing the householders. People with ill-gotten riches were considered smart and noble. There was no compassion or generosity in the people. Famine visited the land frequently and many died of hunger. The kings lived in luxury and sinful pleasures at the expense of their

subjects. They constantly harassed and punished innocent people. Life was miserable indeed in the age of Kali. Dharma had disappeared completely from the face of the earth.

But it was very different when Ram ruled over the three worlds, the world of gods, the world of men and the world of demons. "When Ram sat on the throne as the king of the three worlds, all sorrows vanished, people became happy and mutual enmities disappeared. Peace and harmony reigned all over by the glory of Ram".

राम राज बैठे त्रैलोका ।
हरषित भए गए सब सोका ॥
बयरु न कर काहू सन कोई ।
राम प्रताप बिषमता खोई ॥ (7: 19, 4)

All Ram's subjects were equal. They were free from fear of every kind. All the four castes bathed at the same ghat. Each caste performed its duty faithfully. People lived as the Vedas enjoined on them. They loved one another and were honest. They were generous towards others and grateful for the benefits they received. The world was full of righteousness and sin was unheard of. The four pillars of dharma (truthfulness, purity of body and mind, compassion and love) stood firm.

चारिउ चरन धर्म जग माहीं । (7: 20, 2)

There was no need for magistrates to punish criminals, there was no crime. The staff (symbol of the power to punish) was used only by wandering sanyasins as a symbol of self-discipline. There was no cut throat competition, nor unhealthy rivalry. People were sincere and they trusted one another. There were no secret plotting against others. All were learned and wise, and concerned with the good of others.

The society was monogamous. Men were devoted to their wives and women faithful to their husbands in thought, word and deed.

Ayodhya, the seat of king Ram, excelled all other places in beauty and prosperity. People there enjoyed comforts and pleasures rare even to the gods. Their houses were built of gold and precious stones, and were surrounded by everblooming gardens and parks. Children kept pet birds of different kinds, which flew about and chattered, spreading joy and cheer all over. The market place in Ayodhya was filled with all kinds of wares. The merchants looked like so many Kuberas (Kubera, the god of riches). They gave away whatever people asked for, without price. There were separate ghats for watering the animals and for taking bath. All of them were beautifully built and studded with precious stones. One could hear the story of Ram sung from every house.

No autocrat, Ram held court regularly with the citizens, in the palace. He ruled the kingdom according to the injunctions of the scriptures. Great sages like Narad and the Sanak brothers used to visit him and pay him homage.

In Ramrajya, not only human beings, but every creature was happy and contented. There was perfect harmony in creation. People were never sick. They were comely and handsome, and lived to their full age enjoying excellent health. The trees bent down their branches laden with sweet juicy fruits, for the passers by. The fields were either green or golden ready for harvest, all through the year. The sun gave abundant light and heat, but never caused discomfort. The clouds rained whenever people wished. The rivers flowed full, with cool, pure and wholesome water. The moon bathed the earth with her cool rays. The oceans never crossed their set boundaries. They threw up wonderful pearls on their beaches for people to pick up. The mountains and hills were rich in gems and precious stones. In the lush green forests, trees and creepers bore flowers and fruits through all the seasons of the year. Humming swarms of bees flew busily about visiting flowers and gathering honey. Birds and beasts lived in friendship and harmony. A cool fragrant breeze blew constantly over the earth.

As with the sunrise darkness disappears, thieves go back

to their hideouts and night birds seek shelter, so also when the sun of Ramrajya shone over the world, darkness of ignorance disappeared, sin hid itself and vices and passions withered away like tender flowers in the hot sun. The different virtues bloomed like lotus in various colours. "And being bhaktas of Ram all merited final liberation"

राम भगति रत नर अरु नारी ।

सकल परम गति के अधिकारी ॥ (7: 20, 2)

Ram was the ideal king. His subjects were the ideal subjects. Tulsidas does not place all his hopes for an ideal society on a set of laws or structures to contain evil and promote good. Neither does he believe that abundance of material goods can make men happy. It is bhakti, nearness to the supreme source of good, Paramatman, that makes people good in themselves and good to others. Ram's bhaktas allow him to rule in their own hearts. They see Ram in all beings. They themselves sing and teach others to sing Ram's praises. Tulsidas himself sings : "Praise Ram, the great king and warrior who protects his people. He is the fountain of all virtues. He is beautiful and comely. He is the eagle (Garuda) who destroys the fierce serpent Kala (Death). He hunts down the wild beasts of greed and passions. He is the lion who kills the elephant of lust. He is the sun who drives away the darkness of doubt and sorrow. He is the fire which burns away the forest of rakshasas, the evil forces of the world. He is the frost that kills the swarms of mosquitoes, the countless desires in man. Pay homage to that Ram, and adore him who is the Unchangeable, the Unborn, the Immortal, the delight of the saints and gracious Lord of Tulsidas".

(cfr 7L 29, 1-4)

There was wholesomeness in nature as well as in human society in Ramrajya. Today is a far cry from that harmony in nature and society. If saint Tulsidas were to write his poem today, I am afraid, he would not have been kinder in describing the Kaliyuga. In the present world about half of its population have not sufficient to eat nor to wear. Millions live without a roof over their heads. Not because the earth has not sufficient to go round for all, but because some

appropriate for themselves the lion's share of the earth's gifts. In Bapuji's words: "The earth has enough for everybody's need, but not for everybody's greed". Even in the so-called democracies, the poor and the weak groan under oppression, unable to raise their voices. Our forests are turning into deserts, Our flora and fauna, unable to find a home, are dying out. Our sources of life giving water, even the holy Ganges, are becoming more and more polluted. The ground water sources are being depleted. Thousands of chimneys spread all over stand like serpents spewing out poison all round. The nuclear warheads in their cells are ticking off time and one wonders whether the creators of this Frankenstein will be able to control him when his mood changes.

In our society the chasm between the rich and the poor is becoming wider and deeper. While rulers shout "Welfare state", dishonesty and corruption have their full sway in many regions. The elite, the powerful raise their voices, but the downtrodden remain silent. If ever their voice is to be heard, they must be given their own voice. The elite have to join the weak sections of the society and raise their voices in unison with those of the weaker ones.

Today there are several small groups of courageous women and men who share the lives of their weaker brethren and together with them carry on the struggle for a more just and loving society. Such efforts have to be multiplied and intensified to make the world a better place to live in. The rakshasas of today are not Ravan and his hordes, but racism, casteism, religious fanaticism, self-seeking, imperialism in its different guises and other evils plaguing man and society. We have to carry on a constant struggle against these powers if we are to realize 'Ramrajya' at least partially.

The embers of dying hopes are kept alive among many people through the memory of mythical times, of good and brave kings and happy kingdoms. The people of the state of Kerala, in southern India, celebrate for ten days at a stretch, the reign of their good old king Mahabali (Bali), who though a demon, ruled the country so well, that all his subjects were

honest and virtuous, prosperous and happy. During this festival the poor forget their poverty, the neighbours their enmities. They share their simple home made delicacies with others. This is the one feast, Onam, which people of Kerala dispersed in different parts of India and outside never forget to celebrate.

We have a picture of this hope expressed many times in the Bible. The Jews were a people, often oppressed by their own kings and leaders and hounded by the neighbouring states. The Jewish prophets kept alive the hope of better times in the people especially in the time of national calamities. This hope would be realized if they desisted from oppressing the poor and the widow, if they treated their neighbours justly, in short, if they walked in the way of the Lord. While Jews were in exile in Babylon, one of the great prophets foretold them of their liberation from exile and happy return to their own land.

Filled with the knowledge of the Lord (obeying his laws) they would live in freedom from fear of oppression and of their enemies. they would eat the fat of the land, the fruit of their labour. "They shall find pasture in the desert lands and grazing on all the dunes. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, no scorching heat or sun shall distress them; for one who loves them shall lead them and take them to water at the bubbling springs.... Shout for joy, you heavens, rejoice O earth, you mountains break into songs of triumph, for the Lord has comforted his people and has had pity on his own in their distress" (Book of Isaiah, ch. 49, verses 9, 10, 13).

APPENDIX

PEARLS OF WISDOM

A human being is a wonderful unity of body, mind and spirit. He lives in a world which god Brahma made a mixture of good and evil (gunadoshamaya). It is the duty of man to choose the good and reject the evil. The wise man chooses the good and rejects the evil just as a swan drinks the milk and leaves out the water, through the power of discernment. Scattered in the Ramcharitmanas are many pithy sayings which can lead us to the portals of discerning knowledge. Some of them might have been old proverbs. But they all have passed through the mould of Tulsidas' heart and mind devoted to Ram. Here are collected a number of such sayings. It is difficult to classify them subjectwise. However I have tried to put them under certain general headings.

1. SATSANG (ASSOCIATION WITH THE SAINTS)

तात स्वर्ग अपवर्ग सुख धरिअ तुला एक अंग ।
तूल न ताहि सकल मिलि जो सुख लव सतसंग ॥ (5: 4)

Place on one scale of the balance all the happiness of heaven and even of moksha (final liberation). Place on the other scale the happiness derived from a moment's association with the saints. Be sure, you will find the former too light. (Rakahasi Lankni on meeting Hanuman)

नहिं दरिद्र सम दुख जग माहीं ।
संत मिलन सम सुख जग नाहीं ॥ (7: 120, 7)

In this world, the greatest suffering is poverty. Association with the saints however, is the greatest joy.

धन्य धरी सोई जब सतसंगा । (7: 126, 4)

Blessed is the moment of association with the saints.
(Shiva to Parvati)

सत संगति दुर्लभ संसारा ।
निमिष दंड भरि एकउ बारा ॥ (7: 122, 3)

Even a short association with the saints is a rare grace.

पुन्य पुंज बिनु मिलहिं न संता ।
सतसंगति संसृति कर अंता ॥ (7: 44, 3)

Only the accumulated merit of many a previous birth makes us meet the saints. Once met, Sansara comes to an end.

बिनु हरिकृपा मिलहिं न संता ॥ (5: 6, 2)

Only the grace of Vishnu brings us to the feet of the saints.
(Vibhishan on meeting Hanuman)

गिरिजा संत समागम सम न लाभ कछु आन । (7: 125)

"He Parvati! there is nothing more profitable than the fellowship of the saints."

हानि कुसंग सुसंगति लाहू ।
लोकहुँ बेद बिदित सब काहू ॥
गगन चढइ रज पवन प्रसंगा ।
कीचहिं मिलइ नीच जल संग्गा ॥
साधु असाधु सदन सुक सारी ।
सुमिरहिं राम देहिं गनि गारी ॥
धूम कुसंगति कारिख होइ ।
लिखिअ पुरान मंजु मसि सोई ॥
सोइ जल अनल अनिल संधाता ।
होइ जलद जग जीवन दाता ॥ (1: 6, 4. 5. 6)

The company of the wicked is harmful. Association with the virtuous is beneficial. Experience testifies to it and the Vedas proclaim it.

Dust rises to the sky with the wind. When it falls to the earth

it becomes slush. The parrot and the mina kept in the house of a good man will greet you with "Ram. Ram". The same in the bad man's house will give you a volley of abusive words. Smoke sticking to the walls or to dirt, becomes soot. Mixed with the right materials, it turns into fine ink, to write the scriptures with. The same smoke combining with water, wind and fire, becomes the clouds, bearers of lifegiving water for the earth.

2. SPIRITUAL LESSONS

मोह निसौं सबु सोबनिहारा ।
देखिअ सपन अनेक प्रकारा ॥ (2: 92, 1)

Ignorance turns this world into a night of illusions. All creatures sleep in this night immersed in their dreams.

धरमु न दूसर सत्य समाना ।
आगम निगम पुरान बखाना ॥ (2: 94, 3)

Truth is the supreme dharma. This, the Vedas, Shastras and Puranas declare.

उमा दारु जोषित की नाई ।
सबहि नचावत रामु गोसाई ॥ (4: 10, 4)

Lord Ram makes everything in this world dance like wooden puppets. (Shiva to Parvati)

जनम हेतु सब कहँ पितु माता ।
करम सुभासुभ देइ बिधाता ॥ (2: 254, 3)

We take our birth from parents. The reward of our actions, good or bad, comes from god Brahma.

अनुज बधू भगिनी सुत नारी ।
सुनु सठ कन्या सम ए चारी ॥
इन्ह हि कुदृष्टि बिलोकइ जोई ।
ताहि बधे कछु पाप न होई ॥ (4: 8, 4)

You, oh Fool, know that:
the wife of one's younger brother,
one's sister,
one's daughter-in-law,
one's own daughter,
all these are alike. He who looks at them with impure eyes
deserves death. There is no sin in killing him.
(Ram to the dying Bali)

छिति जल पावक गगन समीरा ।
पंच रचित अति अधम सरीरा ॥
प्रगट सो तनु तव आगे सोवा ।
जीव नित्य केहि लागि तुम्ह रोवा ॥ (4: 10, 2, 3)

Oh, Tara, this humble body (the corpse of your husband) is
made of the five elements: earth, water, fire, sky and air. It
is sleeping before your eyes. But the spirit which animated
this body is eternal, deathless. So do not lament over your
fallen husband.
(Ram to Tara, wife of Bali)

तात तीनि अति प्रबल खल काम क्रोध अरु लोभ ।
मुनि बिग्यान धाम मन करहिं निमिष महुँ छोभ ॥ (3: 38)

Lust, Anger and Greed are men's three powerful foes. They
can agitate in no time the minds even of sages, the very
repositories of spiritual wisdom.

मुनि गन निकट बिहग मृग जाहीं ।
बाधक बधिक विलोकि पराहीं ॥
हित अनहित पसु पछिउ जाना ।
मानुष तनु गुन ग्यान निधाना ॥ (2: 263, 2)

Birds and animals trustingly approach the ascetics, from
the cruel hunters they flee. They know what is good or bad
for them. Should not man know even better? Is he not more
gifted, is he not the very repository of virtues and wisdom?
(Ram to Bharat, in Chitrakoot)

एहि तन कर फल बिषय न भाई ।
 स्क्वाँउ स्वल्प अंत दुखदाई ॥
 नर तनु पाइ विषय मन देहीं ।
 पलटि सुधा ते सठ बिष लेहीं ॥ (7: 43, 1)

Man is not born to wallow in lust. Even the happiness of the higher worlds is short lived. How foolish and unfortunate the man who embraces sexuality and throws away the golden opportunity of human existence. Indeed he overturns the vial of nectar, and drinks poison instead.

(Ram to his brothers)

पुरइनि सघन ओट जल बेगि न पाइअ मर्म ।
 मायाछन्न न देखिऐ जैसैं निर्गुन ब्रह्म ॥ (3: 39)

The lotus leaves hide the purity of water. Ignorance hides the Nirgunabrahman from the unwise.

एहि जग जामिनि जागहि जोगी ।
 परमारथी प्रपंच बियोगी ॥
 जानिअ तबहि जीव जग जागा ।
 जब सब विषय बिलास बिरागा ॥ (2: 92, 2)

Only those yogis detached from all desires and engrossed in the quest of the ultimate goal keep awake in the night (darkness) of illusion. He alone is awake who is not attached to the passions and pleasures of the senses.

धर्म तैं बिरति जोग तैं ग्याना ।
 ग्यान मोछप्रद बेद बखाना ॥ (3: 15, 1)

A dharmic life brings detachment.

A yogic life brings self-realization.

Self-realization brings moksha.

So declare the Vedas.

नर तनु भव बारिधि कहूँ बेरो ।
 सन्मुख मरुत अनुग्रह मेरो ॥
 करनधार सदगुर दृढ़ नावा ।
 दुर्लभ साज सुलभ करि पावा ॥ (7: 43, 4)

"In this vast ocean of sansara:
the saving boat is man's nature,
the favourable wind (for the sail) is my grace,
the helmsman of the boat is the wise Guru.
How difficult it is to have all these together?
But to a bhakta my mercy grants these without fail."

करि कुरूप बिधि परबस कीन्हा ।
बवा सो लुनिअ लहिअ जो दीन्हा ॥ (2: 15, 3)

God Brahma has made me ugly and subject to others. One reaps what one has sown. One gets what one has given (Karma Sansara).
(Manthara to Kaikeyi)

करम प्रधान बिस्व करि राखा ।
जो जस करइ सो तस फलु चाखा ॥ (2: 218, 2)

In this world, it is one's actions that matter. One will gather the fruits of what one sows.

राज नीति बिनु धन बिनु धर्मा ।
हरिहि समर्पे बिनु सतकर्मा ॥
बिद्या बिनु बिबेक उपजाएँ ।
श्रम फल पढ़े किँएँ अरु पाएँ ॥ (3: 20 45)

A kingdom without justice,
wealth without righteous liberality,
good deeds not offered to Vaishnu,
learning which does not give the power of discretion,
all these, even though the result of strenuous labour, are
fruitless and vain.

अग जग जीव नाग नर देवा ।
नाथ सकल जगु काल कलेवा ॥ (7: 93, 4)

All things in this world, animate and inanimate, serpents, human beings, and even the gods, O Lord, are the food of Death.
(Kakabhushundi to Garuda)

सुभ अरु असुभ करम अनुहारी ।।
ईसु देइ फलु हृदयँ बिचारी ।। (2: 76, 4)

God rewards each one according to one's deserts after considering one's actions carefully.

काहु न कोउ सुख दुख कर दाता ।
निज कृत करम भोग सबु भ्राता ।। (2: 91, 2)

No one but oneself is the cause of one's sorrow or happiness.
One reaps the fruits of one's own actions.

तपबल रचइ प्रपंचु बिधाता ।
तपबल बिष्णु सकल जग त्राता ।।
तपबल संभु करहिं संधारा ।
तपबल सेषु धरइ महि भारा ।। (1: 72, 2)

By tapas Brahma created the universe.
By tapas Vishnu sustains it.
By tapas Shiva will destroy it.
By Tapas Shesha supports it.

सब नृप भए जोगु उपहासी ।
जैसे बिनु बिराग संन्यासी ।। (1: 250, 2)

Unworthy kings were objects of contempt,
like sannyasis without detachment, (such sannyasis de-
serve only contempt.)
(spoken in the hall of the swayamvara of Sita)

3. THE VIRTUOUS

जड़ चेतन गुन दोषमय बिस्व किन्ह करतार ।
संत हंस गुन गहहिं पय परिहरि बारि बिकार ।। (1: 6)

The world of animate and inanimate beings is a mixture of good and evil. So the creator made it. The saints accept the

good rejecting the evil, like the swans which drink milk leaving aside water.

डगड़ न संभु सरासनु कैसे ।
कर्मा बचन सर्ता मनु जैसे ॥ (1: 250, 2)

No human power can move the bow of Shiva. No sweet words of a seducer can entice (move the mind of) a faithful wife.

सत्यमूल सब सुकृत सुहाए ।
बेद पुरान बिदित मनु गाए ॥ (2: 27, 3)

All noble deeds spring from truth. So the Vedas and Puranas declare and Manu sings.

सुनु जननी सोइ सुतु बड़भागी ।
जो पितु मातु बचन अनुरागी ॥
तनय मातु पितु तोषनिहारा ।
दुर्लभ जननि सकल संसारा ॥ (2: 40, 4)

O Mother! happy the son who lovingly obeys father and mother. Such sons who gladden the heart of their parents are rare in this world.

(Ram to Kausalya on his departure to the forest)

एहि ते अधिक धरमु नहिं दूजा ।
सादर सासु ससुर पद पूजा ॥ (2: 60. 3)

The noblest duty of a daughter-in-law is the service of her husband's parents.

मातु पिता गुरु स्वामि सिख सिर धरि करहिं सुभायँ ।
लहेउ लाभु तिन्ह जनम कर नतरु जनमु जग जायँ ॥ (2: 70)

Those who gladly follow the advice of their parents, guru and master attain the goals fo life. Otherwise their birth is in vain.

गुर पितु मातु बंधु सुर साई ।
सोइअहिं सकल प्राण की नाई ॥ (2: 73, 3)

Son! serve wholeheartedly your guru, parents, brothers, relatives, the gods and the master.

(Sumitra to Lakshman)

निज दुख गिरि सम रज करि जाना ।

मित्रक दुख रज मेरु समाना ॥ (4: 6, 1)

A true friend considers his own heaviest troubles as a mere particle of dust. But his friend's lightest trouble he considers as heavy as mount Meru.

कोटि बिघ्न ते संत कर मन जिमि नीति न त्याग । (6: 34)

(The firmly planted feet of Angad cannot be moved by the combined might of the rakshasas.) The mind of a saint cannot be turned away from righteousness by anything in the world.

किएहूँ कुबेषु साधु सनमानु ।

जिमि जग जामवंत हनुमानु ॥ (1: 6, 4)

Hanuman the monkey and Jambavan the bear are worshipped in the world. Just so good men are recognized and honoured even if their dress and appearance are unattractive and even repulsive, (like that of Jambavan and Hanuman)

तनु तिय तनय धामु धम धरनी ।

सत्यसंध कहुँ तून सम बरनी ॥ (2: 34, 6)

A man of truth considers his wife, sons, house, riches, the whole world and even his own life as a blade of grass when the pledged word challenges him.

मातु पिता गुर स्वामि निदेसु ।

सकल धरम धरनीधर सेसु ॥ (2: 305, 1)

Obedience to the parents, guru and master is the support of all dharma, just as Shesha is the support of the earth.

साधु अवग्या तुरत भवानी ।

कर कल्याण अखिल कै हानी ॥ (5: 41, 1)

If you hold a righteous man in contempt, be sure that your prosperity and blessings will see a quick end.

सिबि दधीचि बलि जो कछु भाषा ।
तनु धनु तजेउ बचन पनु राखा ॥ (2: 29, 4)

Great persons like Sibi, Dadhichi and Bali kept their words at the cost of their possessions and lives.

4. THE WICKED

पर अकाजु लागि तनु परिहरहीं ।
जिमि हिम उपल कृषी दलि गरहीं ॥ (1: 3, 4)

Just as hail stones, in beating down the crops destroy themselves, a wicked man is ready to sacrifice his life to bring harm on others.

बायस पलिअहिं अति अनुरागा ।
होहिं निरामिष कबहुँ कि कागा ॥ (1: 4, 10)

Rear a crow with affection. Teach it vegetarianism. Will you succeed? Will you ever succeed in changing a wicked man?

जे जनमे कलि काल कराला ।
करतब बायस बेष मराला ॥ (1: 11, 1)

In this wretched kaliyuga, the wicked roam about in the guise of swans, but they behave like crows.

कलि केवल मल मूल मलीना ।
पाप पयोनिधि जन मन मीना ॥ (1: 26, 2)

The kaliyuga is an ocean utterly polluted by sin. The minds of human beings swim in it like fish in water.

जे कामी लोलुप जग माहीं ।
कुटिल काक इव सबहि डेराहीं ॥ (1: 124, 4)

Like a crooked crow, the lascivious and the greedy are afraid of everything in the world.

बैनतेय बलि जिमि चह कागु ।
 जिमि ससु चहै नाग अरिं भागु ॥
 जिमि चह कुसल अकारन कोही ।
 सब संपदा चहै सिवद्रोही ॥
 लोभी लोलुप कल कीरति चहई ।
 अकलंकता कि कामी लहई ॥
 हरि पद बिमुख परम गति चाहा ।
 तस तुम्हार लालचु नरनाहा ॥ (1: 266, 1, 2)

How vain are the expectations and ambitions of some!
 The crow wants to get the offering set apart for Garuda.
 The rabbit covets the share of the lion.
 The man angry for no reason expects happiness.
 A person who dislikes Shiva looks for riches.
 A greedy and covetous person seeks good fame.
 A lustful person wants to preserve his good name.
 A hater of Vishnu desires moksha.
 Is not your ambition to gain the hand of Sita as vain, oh
 Kings?
 (The wise kings to the others in the hall of Sita's swayamvara)

को न कुसंगति पाइ नसाई ।
 रहइ न नीच मते चतुराई ॥ (1: 23, 4)

Bad company ruins all. Do not seek wisdom in the counsel
 of the wicked.

नर सरीर धरि जे पर पीरा ।
 करहिं ते सहहिं महा भव भीरा ॥ (7: 40, 2)

He who inflicts pain on others after receiving human birth,
 will suffer terribly in this fearful ocean of sansara.

सन इव खल पर बंधन करई ।
 खल कड़ाइ बिपति सहि मरई ॥
 खल बिनु स्वारथ पर अपकारी ।
 अहि मूष्क इव सुनु उरगारी ॥ (7 : 120, 9)

In order to bring others into bondage, the wicked undergo much suffering. They are like hemp which allows its skin to be peeled off to make ropes to bind others, while the plant itself dies in the process. The wicked do harm to others for no benefit whatsoever to themselves. They are destructive like serpents and rats.

ताहि कि संपति सगुन सुभ सपनेहुँ मन विश्राम ।
भूत द्रोह रत मोहबस राम बिमुख रति काम ॥ (6: 78)

How can a man;
who is subject to illusion,
cruel towards others, caught in the clutches of passions,
and inimical to Ram,
ever dream of riches, good fortune and peace of mind?

गिरि सरि सिंधु भार नहिँ मोही ।
जस मोहि गरुअ एक परद्रोही ॥ (1: 183, 3)

Mother Earth burdened by the weight of the wicked complains: "The mountains, the rivers and the ocean are light in comparison with the weight of the wicked. It is impossible for me to bear the burden of a single man who inflicts pain on others, oh gods!"

5. THE VIRTUOUS AND THE WICKED

भलो भलाइहि पै लहइ लहइ निचाइहि नीचु ।
सुधा सराहिअ अमरतौँ गरल सराहिअ मीचु ॥ (1: 5)

Goodness blossoms in the good, wickedness flourishes in the wicked. We praise both for their respective strengths, as we praise nectar for its power to grant deathlessness and poison for its death dealing power.

उपजहिँ एक संग जग माहीं ।
जलज जौक जिमि गुन बिलगाहीं ॥
सुधा सुरा सम साधु असाधु ।
जनक एक जग जलधि अगाधु ॥ (1: 4, 3)

The leech and the lotus spring from the same slush, but how different they are! Amrit and liquor are both taken from the depths of the same ocean, yet one wholesome and the other harmful. The good and the wicked are born from the same mother Earth. Yet what a difference!

सुनिअ सुधा देखिअहिं गरल सब करतूति कराल ।

जहँ तहँ काक उलूक बक मानस सकृत मराल ॥ (2: 281)

How strange and difficult to understand the works of the creator! All talk of nectar, yet it is rarely found. Poison, however, is seen everywhere. Crows, owls and herons abound on this earth. The swan, however, is met only in Mansarovar. (The wicked are many, the virtuous few!)

6. MISCELLANEOUS

मन मति रंक मनोरथ राज ।

मति अति नीच ऊँचि रुचि आछी ।

चहिअ अमिअ जग जुरइ न छाछी ॥ (1: 7, 3, 4)

My mind is weak, yet my ambitions are royal. My intellect is mean, yet my fancies indeed are high. I desire nectar, yet I am incapable of obtaining even buttermilk.

(Tulsidas on his ambition to write Ramcharitmanas).

अति अपार जे सरित बर जौ नृप सेतु कराहिं ।

चढ़ि पिपीलिकउ परम लघु बिनु श्रम पारहि जाहिं ॥ (1: 13)

The tiniest ant can easily cross the broadest river, if a king were to build a bridge across it.

नाहिं कोउ अस जनमा जग माहीं ।

पभुता पाइ जाहि मद नाहीं ॥ (1: 59, 4)

If a man attains power over others he will surely become proud and arrogant.

जद्यपि जग दारुन दुख नाना ।

सब तैं कठिन जाति अवमाना ॥ (1: 62, 4)

This world is full of sufferings. But the most painful of all is insult at the hands of one's own people.

जौ सपने सिर काटै कोई ।

बिनु जागे न दूरि दुःख होई ॥ (1: 117, 1)

If you dream that some one is cutting off your head, you will certainly feel the pain as long as the dream lasts. On awakening your pain will cease. (This world may be unreal, but the sufferings of this world cause real pain.)

भरद्वाज कौतुक सुनहु हरि इच्छा बलवान । (1: 127)

Hear, oh Bhardwaj, something amazing. The designs of god Vishnu are irresistible.

कुपथ माग रुज ब्याकुल रोगी ।

बैद न देइ सुनहु मुनि जोगी ॥ (1: 132, 1)

You wise yogi, Narad, listen! Will a good physician give a wrong remedy to a grievously suffering patient, even if he demands it?

तुलसी देखि सुबेषु भूलहि मूढ़ न चतुर नर ।

सुन्दर केकिहि पेखु बचन सुघा सम असन अहि ॥ (1: 161)

"Oh Tulsī! not only fools, but even the clever are deceived by good appearances. The attire of the peacock is beautiful, its voice is as nectar, yet it eats snakes".

रिपु तेजसी अकेल अति लघु करि गनिअ न ताहु ।

अजहुँ देत दुख रबि ससिहि सिर अवसेषित राहु ॥ (1: 170)

A powerful enemy even when alone is not to be taken lightly. The head of Rahu, cut off from the trunk causes suffering to the sun and moon even today.

भरद्वाज सुनु जाहि जब होइ बिधाता बाम ।

धूरि मेरुसम जनक जम ताहि ब्यालसम दाम ॥ (1: 175)

Oh Bhardwaj, hear! When Destiny is against some one dust turns into mount Meru, his own father becomes Yama, and a rope is transformed into a snake.

जिन्ह कै लहहिं न रिपु रन पीठी ।
 नहिं पावहिं परतिय मनु डीठी ॥
 मान लहहिं न जिन्ह कै नाहीं ।
 ते नरबर थोरे जग माहीं ॥ (1: 230, 4)

How few are men of such nobility!
 Men who have never fled from the field of battle,
 who have never desired another man's wife,
 who have never rebuked a beggar.

ब्यर्थ मरहु जनि गाल बजाई ।
 मन मोदकन्हि कि भूख बुलाई ॥ (1: 245, 1)

Vain boasting achieves nothing. Imaginary laddus (sweet balls) do not still man's hunger. (Lakshman to Parasram)

रबि मंडल देखत लघु लागा ।
 उदयै तासु तिभुवन तम भागा ॥ (1: 255, 4)

Though the sun looks small, when it rises, darkness disappears from the three worlds.

मंत्र परम लघु जासु बस बिधि हरि हर सुर सर्व ।
 महामत्त गजराज कहँ बस कर अंकुस खर्ब ॥ (1: 256)

A sacred formula (mantra) is very short. Yet the gods and even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva yield to it. Does not a tiny goad control the strong and furious elephant?

कौसिक कहा छमिअ अपराधु ।
 बाल दोष गुन गर्हि न साधु ॥ (1: 274, 3)

Vishwamitra said to the angry Parsram: "Please forgive (Lakshman's) fault. A saint does not take the faults of a child into account."

बररै बालकु एक सुभाऊ ।
 इन्हहि न संत बिदुषहिं काऊ ॥ (1: 278, 2)

A wasp and a child are of the same nature. Both are naughty.
A sage never finds fault with them.

टेढ़ जानि सब बंदइ काहू ।

बक्र चंद्रमहि ग्रसइ न राहू ॥ (1: 280, 3)

People respect and fear the cunning and the crooked. The crooked moon (crescent) is not swallowed by Rahu. Straight-forwardness can indeed be harmful.

काह न पावकु जारि सक का न समुद्र समाइ ।

का न करै अबला प्रबल केहि जग कालु न खाई ॥ (2: 47)

Does not fire burn everything?

Does not the ocean swallow all things?

Does not Death consume all reality?

Does not a woman who appears weak accomplish all her designs?

जिय बिनु देह नदी बिनु बारी ।

तैसिअ नाथ पुरुष बिनु नारी ॥ (2: 64, 4)

A woman separated from her husband is like a body without life, and a river without water.

गंगा सकल मुद मंगल मूला ।

सब सुख करनि हरनि सब सुला ॥ (2: 86, 2)

Ganges is the source of all joy and blessings. She drives away all sorrow and gives delight to the heart.

सपने होइ भिखारि नृपु रंकु नाकपति होइ ।

जागे लाभु न हानि कछु तिमि प्रपंच जिये जोइ ॥ (2: 92)

In dream a beggar becomes king, a poor man becomes the rich Indra, On awakening they are back in their previous state. Is not the world but a dream!

बिषई जीव पाइ प्रभुताई ।

मूढ मोह बस होहि जनाई ॥ (2: 227, 1)

Let power fall to the lot of a hedonist. He reveals his true nature. Passions rule his life.

कही तात तुम्ह नीति सुहाई ।
सब तैं कठिन राजमदु भाई ॥ (2: 230, 3)

"Aright you have spoken, oh brother! King's power is the strongest of all intoxicants."

नवनि नीच कै अति दुखदाई ।
जिमि अंकुस धनु उरग बिलाई ॥ (3: 23, 4)

Be on guard when a mean person plays the humble man. He is out to bring you harm.
Beware of the crooked goad,
the bent bow,
the crouching cat,
and the snake bent backwards.

तब मारीच हृदयैं अनुमाना ।
नवहि बिरोधैं नहि कल्याना ॥
सस्ती मर्मी प्रभु सठ धनी ।
बैद बैदि कबि मानस गुनी ॥ (3: 25, 2)

Marrech thought in his mind:
Do not antagonize:
a man skilled in the use of arms,
one who knows your secrets,
your master,
a wicked man,
a rich person,
your own physician,
and a bard (Professional singer or story teller),
for they can harm you.
Do not antagonize:
a learned man and wise person,
for they can help you.

दामिनि दमक रह न घन माहीं ।
खल कै प्रीति जया थिर नाहीं ॥ (4: 13, 1)

Lightning appears and disappears in the fraction of a second. It never remains in the clouds. So is the friendship of the wicked. It never lasts.

समिति समिति जल भरहिं तलावा ।

जिमि सदगुन सज्जन पहिं आवा ॥ (14: 13, 4)

Water collects all around and flows into the pond. All virtues flow in and fill the heart of a good man.

कबहुँ प्रबल बह मारुत जहँ तहँ मेघ बिलाहिं ।

जिमि कपूत के उपजे कुल सद्धर्म नसाहिं ॥ (4: 15)

A storm disperses the clouds in all directions. An unworthy son destroys the nobility and dharma of his family.

सुखी मीन जे नीर अगाधा ।

जिमि हरि सरन न एकउ बाधा ॥ (4: 16, 1)

Fish swim freely in deep water. Those who have taken refuge in Vishnu swim freely without any obstacle.

मोह न अंध कीन्ह केहि केही ।

को जग काम नचाव न जेही ॥

तुस्नौं केहि न कीन्ह बौराहा ।

केहि कर हृदय क्रोध नहिं दाहा ॥ (7: 69, 4)

Who in this world has not been blinded by passion?

Who has not danced puppetlike to lust?

Who has not been maddened by desire?

Who has not been burned by the fire of anger?

कीट मनोरथ दारु सरीरा ।

जेहि न लाग घुन को अस धीरा ॥

सुत बित लोक ईषना तीनी ।

केहि कै मति इन्ह कृत न मलीनी ॥ (7: 70, 3)

The body is the wood, and ambition the woodworm. Who is so strong that the worm has not burrowed into him? Man longs after progeny, wealth and fame. Who is there whose mind has not been sullied by these?

नित नूतन सब बाढ़त जाई ।
जिमि प्रतिलाभ लोभ अधिकाई ॥ (1: 179, 1)

Ravan was winning victory after victory and his prosperity was increasing by leaps and bounds. And his ambitions were increasing with every victory and every new gain. A covetous man's greed increases with every gain. So did Ravan's.

सुनु प्रभु बहुत अवग्या किँएँ ।
उपज क्रोध ग्यानिन्ह के हिँएँ ॥
अति संघरषन जौ कर कोई ।
अनल प्रगट चंदन ते होई ॥ (7: 110, 8)

Too much disrespect can kindle anger even in a sage. Too much friction can ignite even the cool sandalwood.

जलु पय सरिस बिकाइ देखहु प्रीतिकि रीति भलि ।
बिलग होइ रसु जाइ कपट खटाई परत पुनि ॥ (1: 57)

Milk and water mix so well that water sells as good as milk. Add a little sour substance to it, they separate. The taste too disappears. Friendship unites two people. The sour deceit destroys love and separates them.

मनु मलीन तनु संदर कैसैं ।
बिष रस भरा कनक घटु जैसैं ॥ (1: 277, 4)

A handsome man with an evil mind is like a pot of gold filled with poison.

सचिव बैद गुर तीनि जौ प्रिय बोलहिं भय आस ।
राज धर्म तन तीनि कर होइ बेगिहीं नास ॥ (5: 37)

Don't trust a minister, a physician or a teacher, when they try to be overpleasing. They may be fearing your displeasure or desiring your favour. If you do, your kingdom, your life and your integrity will disappear.

संग ते जती कुमंत्र ते राजा ।
मान ते ग्यान पान ते लाजा ॥

प्रीति प्रनय बिनु मद ते गुनी ।
नासहिं बेगि नीति अस सुनी ॥ (3: 20, 5. 6)

Desire destroys an ascetic.
Bad counsel ruins a king.
Conceit blinds wisdom.
Honour vanishes with drunkenness.
Absence of genuine love undermines friendship.
Pride kills virtue.
So say the wise.

रिपु रुज पावक पाप प्रभु अहि गनिअ न छोट करि । (3: 21)
Do not take lightly your enemy, sickness, fire, sin, a snake
or your master.

पालव बैठि पेडु एहिं काटा ।
सुख महुँ सोक ठाटु थरि ठाटा ॥ (2: 46, 3)
Sitting on the branch Kaikeyi cut down the tree. In the midst
of joy she spread out misery.

सठ सन बिनय कुटिल सन प्रीती ।
सहज कृपन सन सुंदर नीती ॥
ममता रत सन ग्यान कहानी ।
अति लोभी सन बिरति बखानी ॥
क्रोधिहि सम कामिहि हरि कथा ।
ऊसर बीज बैँ फल जथा ॥ (5: 57, 1, 2)

Make a humble request to a wicked man.
Show affection to a crooked person.
Preach liberality to a miser.
Talk wisdom to a selfish man.
Counsel detachment to the greedy.
Recommend equanimity to the violent.
Narrate Ramkatha to the lascivious.
These are as sowing seeds on barren soil.

काटेहिं पइ कदरी फरइ कोटि जतन कोउ सीचं ।
बिनय न मान खगेस सुनु डाटेहिं पइ नव नीचं ॥ (5: 38)

Water a plantain as much as you wish. Fruit it will yield only when cut. Make as many humble requests as possible to a mean man. Bend he will, only when reprimanded.

फुलइ फरइ न बेत जदपि सुधा बरषहिं जलद ।
मूरुख हृदयै न चेत जौं गुर मिलहिं बिरचि सम ॥ (6: 16)

The cane will neither flower nor bear fruit even if the clouds were to rain nectar. A fool's mind will not be enlightened even if he were to have a guru as wise as Brahma.

कौल कामबस कृपिन बिमूढ़ा ।
अति दरिद्र अजसी अति बूढ़ा ॥
सदा रोगबस संतत क्रोधी ।
बिष्णु बिमुख श्रुति संत बिरोधी ॥
तनु पोषक निंदक अघ खानी ।
जीवत सव सम चौदह प्रानी ॥ (6: 30, 1, 2)

These fourteen are living corpses:
one who follows lefthanded tantra,
one engrossed in sensual passions,
a miser,
a crass fool,
an extremely poor man,
a person of ill fame,
a worn out old person,
an incurable sick,
one who is constantly angry,
a person inimical to Vishnu,
a hater of saints and the vedas,
one whose only concern is his body,
a slanderer, and
an inveterate sinner.

सेवक सठ नृप कृपन कुनारी ।
कपटी मित्र सुल सम चारी ॥ (4: 6, 5)

A stupid servant, a miserly king, a wayward wife and a false friend; all these four are like sharp spears.

निन्हहि ज्ञान उपदेसा रावन ।
 आपुन मंद कथा सुभ पावन ॥
 पर उपदेस कुसल बहुतेरे ।
 जे आचरहि ते नर न घनेरे ॥ (6: 77, 1)

Ravan the foolish and cruel king could give wholesome advice to others. Many can preach well to others. But how few live accordingly !!

संसार महेँ पुरुष त्रिबिध पाटल रसाल पनस समा ।
 एक सुमनप्रद एक सुमन फल एक फलइ केवल लागहीं ।
 एक कहहिं कहहिं करहिं अपर एक करहिं कहत न बागहीं ॥

(6 Khand after doha 89)

People are like the rose bush, the mango tree or the jack tree. Rose gives flowers, but no fruits, the mango tree gives flowers as well as fruits, the jack tree gives fruits, but no flowers. Some people only boast, some others say and do what they say, still others do not speak, but just act.

नाथ दैव कर कवन भरोसा ।
 सोषिअ सिंधु करिअ मन रोसा ॥
 कादर मन कहूँ एक अधारा ।
 दैव दैन आलसी पुकारा ॥ (5: 50, 2)

"Lord, what trust can you place in blind Fate. Only cowards rely on Destiny, only the idle clamour Fate! Fate!

जासु भवनु सुरतरु तर होई ।
 सहि कि दरिद्र जनित दुख सोई ॥ (1: 107, 2)

When one has his house under the wish-yielding tree (Kalpavriksha) how can he suffer the pangs of poverty?

कत बिधि सृजी नारि जग माहीं ।
 पराधीन सपनेहुँ सुखु नाहीं ॥ (1: 101, 3)

Why did Brahma create the woman? How can she, subject to another as she is, even dream of happiness.

मागउँ भीख त्यागि निज धरमू ।

आरत काह न करइ कुकरमू ॥ (2: 203, 4)

I, a warrior (kshatriya), against my own caste rules, now beg for alms from you. Is there any deed too mean for a man in agony?

जो अति आतप ब्याकुल होई ।

तरु छाया सुख जानइ सोई ॥ (7: 68, 2)

Only he who was in the scorching sun, knows the comfort of a shady tree.

संत बिटप सरिता गिरि धरनी ।

पर हित हेतु सबन्ह कै करनी ॥ (7: 124, 3)

The saint, the tree, the river, the mountain and the earth exist for the good of others.

ENDNOTES

1. The kings of Ikshavaku dynasty are descendants of god Brahma. One of the ancestors of this royal clan was Vivaswan, the sun. Manu and Ikshavaku were famous kings of the dynasty. The dynasty is called the Ikshavaku or the Solar dynasty after the names of the two famous ancestors.

2. The three gunas (strands) are the basic components of every creature. They are sattwa guna, light and goodness; rajas (rajoguna), energy, vitality and passion, and tamas (tamoguna), sluggishness, evil and darkness. One or the other of these gunas can be dominant in a particular individual or thing.

3. By rationalism we do not mean the use of reason, but "treating reason as the ultimate authority in religion as elsewhere." (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1985). By technological culture we mean the extolling of the application of science as a cureall for human problems.

4. Vaikunth (Vaikuntha in sanskrit) is the abode of god Vishnu. It seems that Tulsidas uses the word to mean also the blissful union of the devotee with Parabrahman. The particular meaning should be understood from the context.

5. Prasad is the food offered to the gods and later distributed among the participants in the offering, as a symbol of blessing of the gods.

6. Yuga. A kalpa is the span of time from the creation to the destruction of the universe. A kalpa consists of one thousand chaturyugas or 4,320,000,000 years. A chaturyuga is divided into four yugas, viz. sattwa yuga, 1,728,000 years; treta yuga, 1,296,000 years; dwapara yuga, 864,000 years and kali yuga, 432,000 years. Sattwa yuga is the age of dharma, righteousness. Dharma is on gradual decline from the sattwa yuga to kali yuga which is full of wickedness and evil.

7. Varnashramadharma. Varna means colour, which in course of time came to mean caste. Of the four basic castes, the higher three, brahmin, Kshatriya and vaysya are savarna or castes of the fair colour, and the fourth caste, shudra is supposed to be of dark colour. The four castes are subdivided into numerous subcastes. The scriptures have laid down the duties and privileges of the different castes. Time and usage made numerous additions to the already existing regulations. As these rules enjoyed religious sanction, they were considered part of dharma or righteousness. This is varna dharma or fulfilment of the caste duties.

Ashrams or states of life are also four. Brahmacharya is the unmarried state devoted to the study of the scriptures and the arts and sciences to equip a person to fulfil his duties as a householder. The second ashram, garhastya or the state of life a householder. A householder has respon-

sibilities towards his family and society. Once the husband and wife have settled their children in life (when they have seen their children's children, they say), they leave the security and comforts of home to go and live in the forest. This is Vanaprasta, during which they prepare themselves to embrace the last state, sannyasa, and devote themselves to the quest of moksha, the final liberation. The sumtotal of the duties devolving on a person as a member of a particular caste and from his state in life, is called Varnashramadharma.

8. Once a powerful demon king Bali (Mahabali) ruled the three worlds, (world of the gods, of men and of demons). His subjects were honest, prosperous and happy. He ousted the gods from their world, and they complained to god Vishnu. Vishnu descended on earth in the form of a dwarf, Vaman. Vaman requested king Bali for a piece of ground which he could cover in three strides. The generous and unsuspecting king granted his request gladly. Thereupon Vaman grew to such an enormous size that he covered the world of men and gods in two strides, and demanded the third. Mahabali offered his own head for the third step. Vaman put his foot on the head and thrust him into the netherworld. He is allowed to visit his former kingdom once a year, during the Onam festival.

9. The four states of awareness are the waking stage (Jagrti), the dreaming stage (Swapna), deep dreamless sleep (Sushupti) and Turiya. In the Turiya stage the individual self, free from all illusion is aware of its identity with the Universal Self.

10. Illusion, Riddhis, Siddhis. Illusion is the power which darkens the mind from recognizing the reality of things.

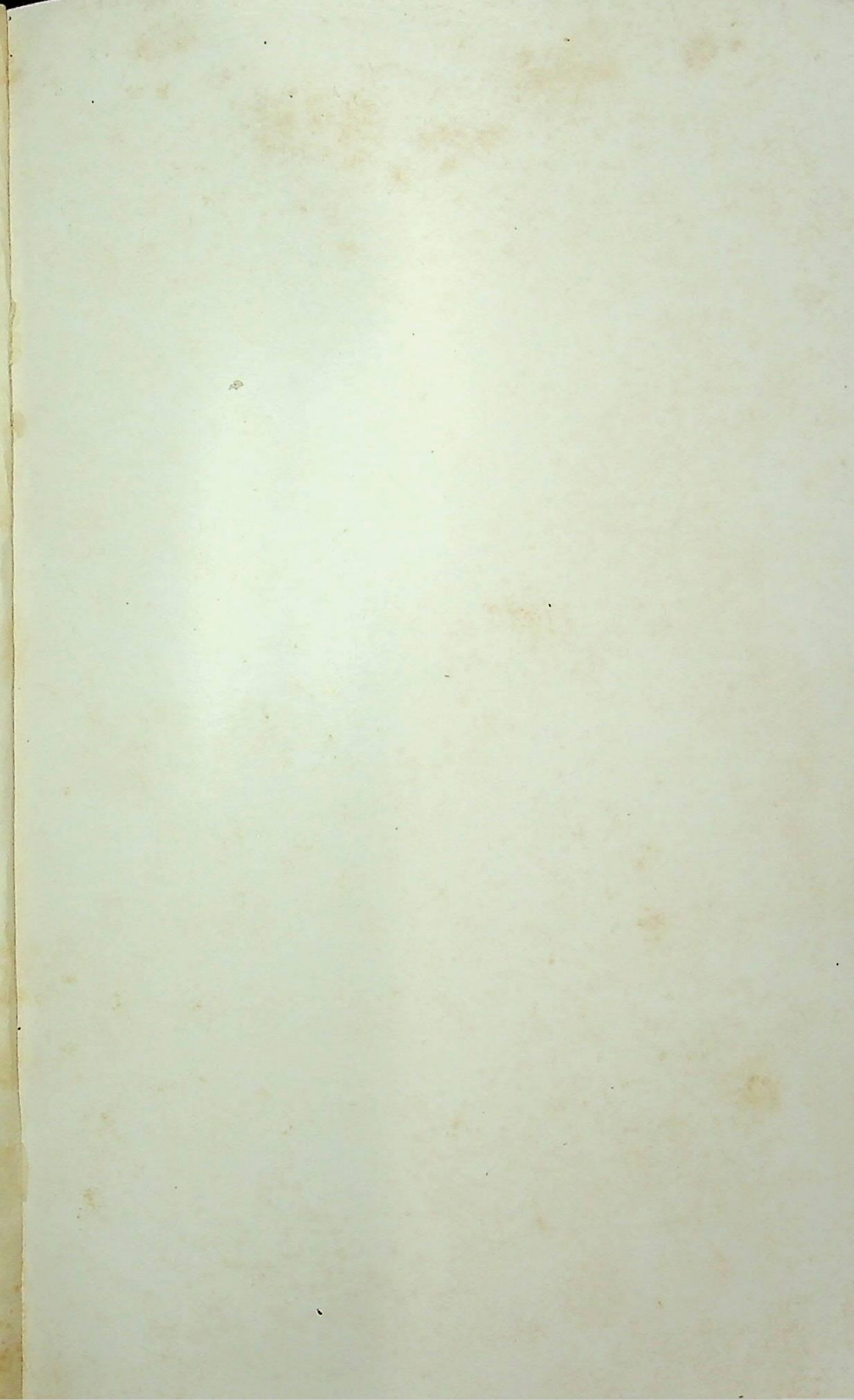
Riddhis are riches and prosperity which fills the mind with worldly desires. Siddhis are suprahuman powers acquired through strenuous practice of yoga and asceticism. They are eight in number. 1. Anima, the power to reduce the size of one's body to that of an atom. 2. Mahima, the power to enlarge one's body infinitely. 3. Garima, capacity to become infinitely heavy. 4. Laghima, ability to become extremely light. 5. Prapti, access to all places. 6. Prakamya, realization of all one's desires. 7. Isatwa, overlordship. 8. Vasitwa, power to bring everyone and everything under one's control. Siddhi can make one proud and arrogant.

11. Indriya. There are five gyanendriyas (buddhindriyas) or senses of perception viz. eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Karmendriyas or organs of action (faculties) are also five viz. the generative and excretory organs, hands, legs and mouth.

12. Following the advice of sage Narad, Jayant went back to Ram asking pardon. After picking out one of his eyes for punishment, Ram set him free.

13. Vaitarani is a river full of dirt like blood, bones and hair. A dead person has to cross this river to reach the infernal regions.

14. Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanak Kumar are four brothers, sons of god Brahma. They are perpetual celibates and excel all the sages in holiness, learning and wisdom.



Shri Ramcharitmanas

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